

Briefing note: Renewable energy in New England and Australia

June 2016

Locals investing in rooftop solar

Analysis by Solar Citizens shows that there is a significant household solar constituency in New England, who are using solar systems to reduce their energy bills. Many of these people may be attracted to battery storage in coming years, to further reduce their energy costs. A recent [national poll](#) shows 81% of solar households are keen to get batteries.

According to the [Solar Scorecard](#) report the seat has 36MW of rooftop solar, thanks to 9332 installations. There are over 17,000 voters – or 19% of the total - with solar PV in the seat. As late as 2007, Australia only had about 8000 PV systems in total.

New England has solar hotspots where a high proportion of dwellings have solar PV installed. For example, there are solar PV systems on over 36% of homes in the 2371 postcode, which includes Emmaville and Deepwater. By way of comparison, just over 16.5% of Australian dwellings have rooftop solar PV.

Australia had 1,527,684 rooftop PV systems, representing 4,809 MW of installed PV capacity, as of March 31, 2016, according to data provided by Australia's Clean Energy Regulator.

There is a 99.7 kW solar PV array on the Bupa aged care home in Tamworth.

New England supports renewable energy, coal toxic

A poll conducted in New England last year found high support for Australia gradually transitioning to 100% renewable energy. 71.9% of respondents support this policy and only 18.1% oppose it (with 10.1% undecided). There is a significant majority support for this policy among all key voter groups, including National Party voters, at 67.3%.

Support for 100% renewable energy among New England voters

| | Total | Female | Male | 18 – 34 | 35 – 50 | 51 – 65 | 65+ |
|------------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Strongly support | 44.0% | 46.5% | 41.3% | 46.5% | 48.2% | 44.7% | 35.5% |
| Support | 27.9% | 28.8% | 26.9% | 31.9% | 23.6% | 25.9% | 30.7% |
| Oppose | 11.4% | 8.8% | 14.1% | 5.4% | 11.1% | 13.7% | 15.7% |
| Strongly oppose | 6.7% | 4.2% | 9.4% | 8.6% | 5.5% | 5.6% | 6.6% |
| Undecided | 10.1% | 11.7% | 8.3% | 7.6% | 11.6% | 10.2% | 11.4% |

| | Total | Nationals | Labor | Greens | Undecided |
|------------------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|-----------|
| Strongly support | 44.0% | 34.3% | 53.7% | 86.7% | 41.5% |
| Support | 27.9% | 33.0% | 27.8% | 10.0% | 28.7% |
| Oppose | 11.4% | 17.3% | 4.6% | 0.0% | 2.1% |
| Strongly oppose | 6.7% | 6.6% | 5.6% | 3.3% | 7.4% |
| Undecided | 10.1% | 8.8% | 8.3% | 0.0% | 20.2% |

Source: Conducted by ReachTEL for The Australia Institute. Sample 747 residents of the federal electorate of New England. Evening of 17 December 2015. Question: Do you support or oppose Australia gradually transitioning to 100 per cent renewable energy by the year 2030?

A March 2016 poll found that 62.1% oppose the Shenhua coal mine on the Liverpool plains, with only 26.3% in support (and 11.6% undecided). National Party voters are the highest supporting group of voters but only 35.9% are in support and 52.4% opposed (and 11.6% undecided).

Views towards Shenhua coal mine among New England voters

| | Total | Female | Male | 18 – 34 | 35 – 50 | 51 – 65 | 65+ |
|------------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Strongly support | 11.0% | 8.3% | 14.0% | 11.3% | 10.1% | 13.3% | 8.9% |
| Support | 15.3% | 15.2% | 15.4% | 16.9% | 12.1% | 13.3% | 19.5% |
| Undecided | 11.6% | 11.4% | 11.8% | 17.6% | 12.1% | 6.7% | 9.8% |
| Oppose | 19.0% | 18.3% | 19.9% | 14.8% | 17.4% | 20.7% | 24.4% |
| Strongly oppose | 43.1% | 46.9% | 39.0% | 39.4% | 48.3% | 46.0% | 37.4% |

| | Total | Nationals | Ind – Windsor | Greens | Undecided |
|------------------|-------|-----------|---------------|--------|-----------|
| Strongly support | 11.0% | 16.9% | 7.5% | 0.0% | 3.4% |
| Support | 15.3% | 19.0% | 10.3% | 5.3% | 24.1% |
| Undecided | 11.6% | 11.6% | 10.3% | 21.1% | 20.7% |
| Oppose | 19.0% | 19.8% | 20.1% | 10.5% | 13.8% |
| Strongly oppose | 43.1% | 32.6% | 51.9% | 63.2% | 37.9% |

Source: Conducted by ReachTEL for The Australia Institute. Sample 662 residents of the federal electorate of New England. Evening of 10 March 2016. Question: Do you support or oppose the proposed Shenhua coal mine on the Liverpool Plains?

Australians support renewable energy

National results from recent polling again demonstrate renewable energy's massive popularity, with 3 in 4 voters supporting maximum renewable energy targets.

Government investment in local clean energy

There are significant renewable energy and energy conservation efforts in New England which were made possible thanks to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC). The CEFC invests in clean energy and returns a profit to the taxpayer while helping companies build projects which would otherwise be unviable.

Inverell meat processor Bindaree Beef is switching out of coal energy for its operations, thanks to federal government grant and loan funds. The upgrade will replace a coal fired boiler and rendering plant, which burns about 7,300 tonnes of coal each year. Bindaree is accessing up to \$15 million through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which will leverage an Australian Government grant of around \$20 million plus commercial finance to meet an expected project cost of up to \$40 million.

The overall trend for Australia is that renewable energy investment confidence is low. In 2010 Australia ranked 4th in the world on the Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index, which is published by EY. We were behind only US, China, Germany and the UK (in that order). Australia is now 10th.

Barnaby Joyce's conversion

At this election Barnaby Joyce is making an unexpected shift in his stance on renewable energy.

As Michelle Grattan noted last month, "One of the ironies of Joyce's campaign revolves around wind power. He used to be a critic but the other day he opened a A\$400 million wind farm project being constructed near Glen Innes." When asked about his recent conversion, Joyce complained, "These are the cards I'm dealt".

In past days, Mr Joyce was a spirited critic of renewable energy and its funding bodies:

- "I hear the arguments for renewable and photovoltaic energy. Unfortunately, in regional areas we are not going to have photovoltaic tractors. We are not going to have photovoltaic fishing boats or solar driven mining plants." (Senate Hansard, Fuel Tax Bill 2006 - 22 June 2006, p. 160)
- "What is this insane lemming-like desire to go to renewables going to do to our economy?" (MPI - 6 February 2013, p.331)
- "I have heard we are going to bring forth the electric car. They have been bringing that forth since 1901. It has arrived; it is called a golf buggy." "...we are paying \$10 billion to the Greens for their green bank, where they will invest in completely dippy ideas." (Clean Energy Finance Corporation - 25 June 2012, p.4335)