

Renewable energy development in Southern Queensland

Community perspectives

October 2021

Background

The task of building new generation and transmission infrastructure required to support increased renewable energy generation in Queensland is vital to achieve the state's commitment to 50% renewable energy by 2030.

Transmission infrastructure and associated renewable energy projects will be hosted in regional communities in several Renewable Energy Zones (REZ).

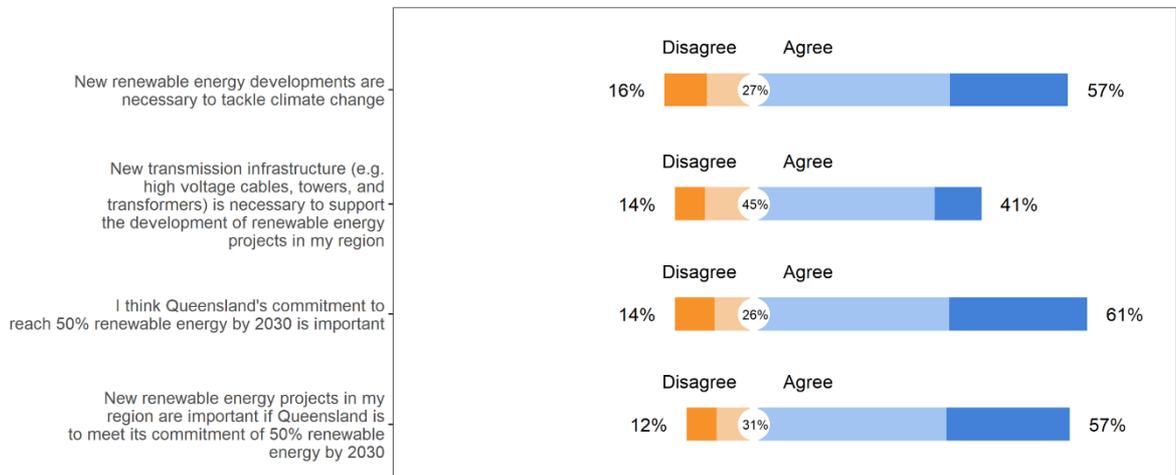
Research examining the sentiment of community members toward renewable energy development and Powerlink, specifically, was conducted across Southern Queensland in mid-2021.

Support for renewable targets

Community members are positive toward Queensland's renewable energy commitment, see the role that new infrastructure plays in helping to achieve it, and are broadly supportive about this infrastructure being developed within their specific communities.

In addition:

- 60% agreed their region was suitable for solar farms (14% disagreed), 49% for wind farms (21% disagreed),
- 51% indicated they did not know what was involved in developing new renewable projects (18% that they do to some extent).



[Middle scores represent a "Neutral" response]

Key statistics

- 539 surveys completed, 468 included for analysis after cleaning from four LGAs:
 - Toowoomba: 270
 - Maranoa: 41
 - South Burnett: 70
 - Western Downs: 87
- 12 landholder interviews conducted
- 69% female, 31% male
- 24% Powerlink landholders
- 18% own or operate a business
- 95% have never worked for Powerlink
- 12% considered themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage

Value proposition for development

Strong elements of a local value proposition included:

- creating local employment,
- opportunities for local businesses to supply goods and services,
- meaningful community input into planning processes, and
- effectively managing environmental impacts of development.

Currently, visual amenity and noise impacts were two of the least important characteristics informing support for new projects, although this may change as development ramps up. Ensuring community expectations about impacts and benefits in the short and longer term are realistic will be important.

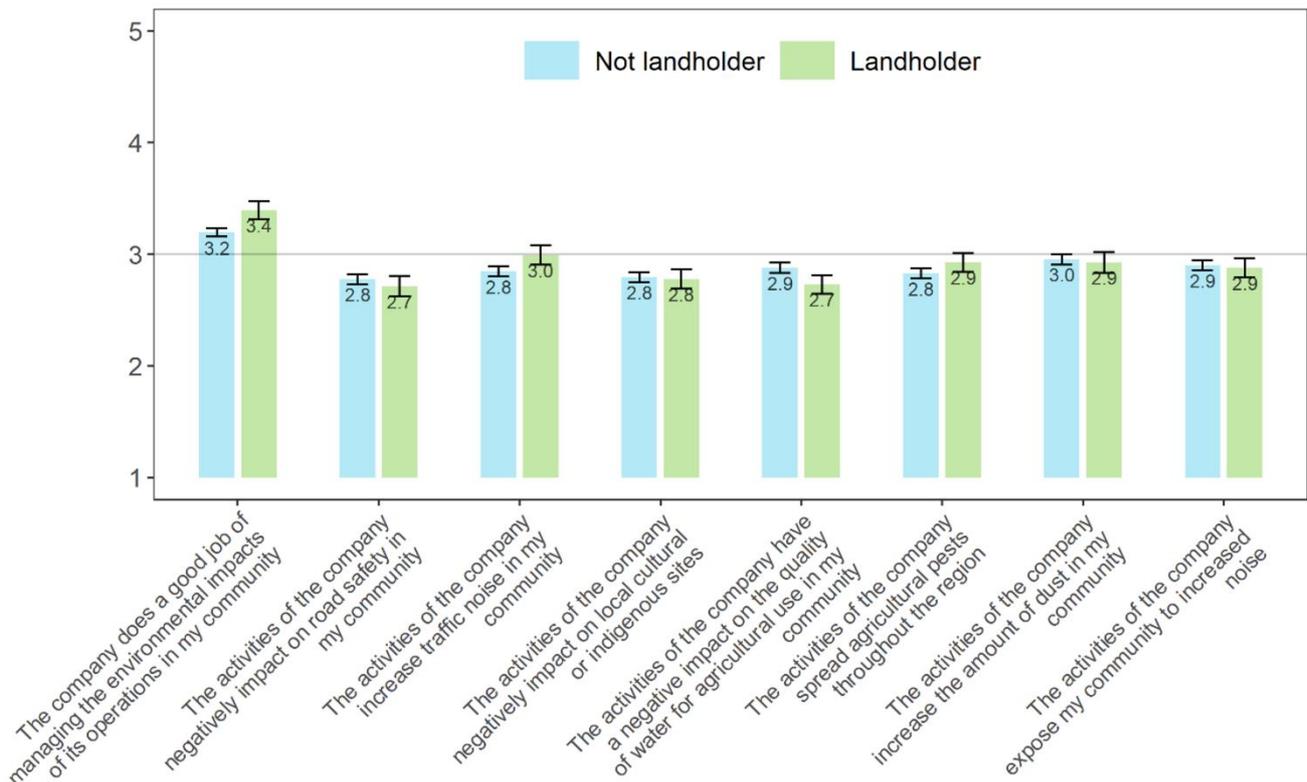
Powerlink landholders rated all characteristics as being more important than non-landholders. Differences between these groups were greatest

on the following attributes:

- amount of input local community members have in planning,
- (that development will have) positive climate change impacts,
- reducing farming land availability,
- noise impacts, and
- impacts on local residents during construction.

Current Powerlink impacts

Overall, Powerlink was found to have only modest impacts on community members currently, with landholders and non-landholders sharing similar perspectives. However, landholder interviewees indicated that where Powerlink or its contractors were perceived to have demonstrated a lack of respect in their interactions or the way work had been conducted, the negative relational impacts persisted over a long period of time.



The higher the average score the greater the level of agreement with each item

Powerlink relationships

Acceptance of new development depends in part on the nature of relationships that a developer has with the communities it works alongside. Support for new transmission infrastructure was contingent on how Powerlink manages these processes. When asked the extent to which participants trust Powerlink to manage these processes responsibly and respectfully, there was greater levels of agreement than disagreement, but “neutral” scores were high (i.e. 42%) indicating greater uncertainty or lack of direct experience on which to make a judgement.

Even higher levels of neutral scores were observed on direct measures of Powerlink responsiveness to community concerns. Again, much greater proportions of participants agreed than disagreed that Powerlink listens effectively to community opinions and always tries to address community concerns, for example.

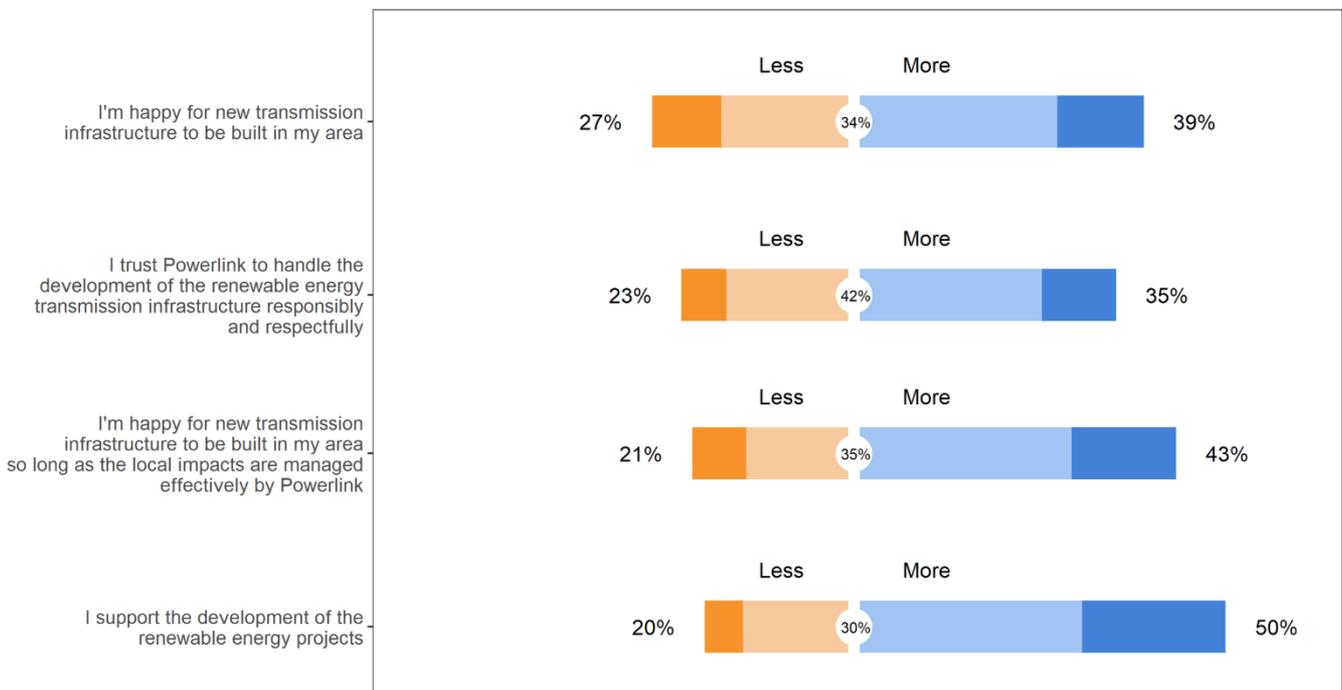
However, “neutral” responses on these responsiveness items were above 50% of the sample.

This indicates that Powerlink has solid standing within the community and enjoys significant goodwill but it will need to ensure that its actions through this new development phase positively inform community sentiment in order to shift uncertain responses into more positive territory.

No great differences by LGA were observed on these measures and landholders were slightly more positive across relational measures.

Trust and acceptance

Current levels of community trust in and acceptance of Powerlink activities are both just above the mid-point of the scale used. These ratings were slightly higher among landholders. Relative to resource companies, for example, these ratings are solid, although there is significant opportunity to improve, particularly on ratings of acceptance.



A model for social licence

A path analysis was conducted to determine the key attributes, and their relative importance, of Powerlink's social licence to operate in the region.

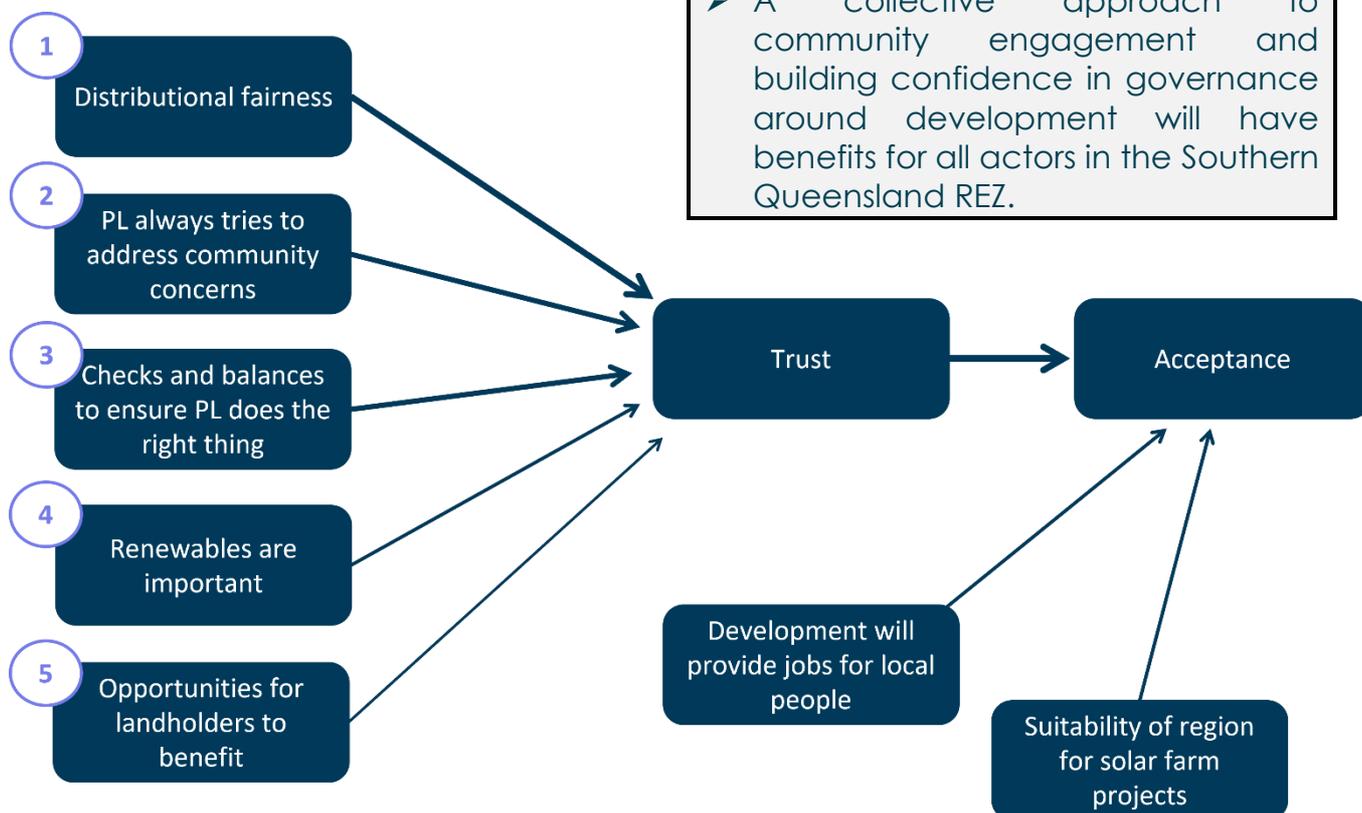
Key insights include:

- trust in Powerlink drives acceptance of its activities; focusing on trust is the most effective way to mitigate social risk during development,
- community feeling they are receiving a fair share of the benefits of development is the strongest driver of trust, followed by the extent to which Powerlink listens to and acts on community concerns,
- confidence in governance around development is the third strongest driver of trust,
- the more people feel renewables are important to address climate change, the more they trust Powerlink's role in delivering renewable projects,

- broader community will trust Powerlink more if they feel landholders are able to benefit from the direct impact of new development.
- the suitability of the region for solar projects and the local jobs that renewable projects deliver directly influence acceptance of Powerlink, but do not influence trust in the organisation.

Reflections on the data

- The case for renewables is strong but Powerlink and others must help communities to develop realistic expectations about the process of development and the benefits/impacts that will come from them.
- Developing better systems and a social performance framework to enhance responsiveness will identify and mitigate issues as they emerge.
- A collective approach to community engagement and building confidence in governance around development will have benefits for all actors in the Southern Queensland REZ.



- Numbers reflect relative importance of trust drivers
- Width of arrow reflects strength of relationship
- Direction of arrow reflects direction of relationship
- All pathways are positive (e.g. more trust leads to higher acceptance)