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Workforce Accommodation and Employment Strategy – Gara BESS

Prepared by: ACEnergy

Purpose: To address Armidale Regional Council's RFI requesting a comprehensive Workforce Accommodation and Employment Strategy as part of the EIS amendment for the Gara Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Project.

Date: October 2025

1. Executive Summary

ACEnergy recognises Armidale Regional Council's request for a clear strategy to manage workforce sourcing, local participation, accommodation, and cumulative impacts during the Gara BESS Project. This document outlines ACEnergy's proposed approach to:

- Source labour locally where feasible,
- Provide opportunities for First Nations peoples and under-represented groups,
- Avoid using tourist or private rental accommodation,
- Coordinate regionally to manage cumulative accommodation and service impacts, and
- Deliver measurable economic and social benefits to the Armidale Local Government Area (LGA).

This document is a preliminary strategy, to be finalised during post-consent stage in consultation with Armidale Regional Council.

Certain commitments in this document are **conditional on the project securing a Long-Term Energy Service Agreement (LTESA)** that provides revenue and delivery certainty. These are clearly identified throughout as *conditional commitments*.

2. Workforce Sourcing and Socio-Economic Approach

2.1 Objectives

ACEnergy's workforce strategy aims to:

- Maximise local participation and economic benefit,
- Build long-term regional skills in the renewable energy sector,
- Support inclusive pathways for First Nations and disadvantaged groups, and
- Ensure transparent reporting and adaptive management.

2.2 Workforce Profile

- **Construction Phase:** Up to approximately 80 FTE workers over 60 weeks.
- **Operation Phase:** Up to approximately 5 FTE long-term operational roles for 20+ years.

2.3 Workforce Sourcing

- **Primary sourcing:** Armidale and surrounding New England region.
- **Secondary sourcing:** Broader NSW where specific skills are not locally available.
- **Local engagement:** All roles will be advertised locally first.



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- **Collaboration:** ACEnergy will work with the Armidale Regional Council, Chamber of Commerce, University of New England (UNE), and local employment providers to identify candidates and local suppliers.

3. Local Participation and Employment Development

3.1 Commitments

- **Local Recruitment:** Advertise roles locally prior to statewide recruitment.
- **Procurement:** Break major work packages where practicable to enable participation of local SMEs and social enterprises.
- **Monitoring:** Regular workforce and procurement dashboards tracking:
 - Local vs non-local hires
 - First Nations participation
 - Trainees/apprentices engaged
 - Spend with local suppliers
- **First Nations Pathways:** Consult with local Aboriginal groups, including the Armidale Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) and the Armidale & Region Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place (ACCKP), to co-design culturally appropriate programs that respect Aboriginal traditions and address community priorities, ensuring meaningful participation in project employment and procurement opportunities.
- **Education Programs:** Continue collaboration with UNE, local education institutions and programs to support student placements, site visits, and renewable energy awareness.
- **Workplace Inclusion:** Provide cultural awareness and safety training for all staff and contractors.

3.2 Conditional Commitments (LTESA-Dependent)*

If Gara BESS secures an LTESA, ACEnergy will formalise and deliver the following:

- **Industry Participation Plan (IPP):** Define quantitative local employment, Aboriginal participation, traineeship, and procurement targets.
- **Scholarships and Internships:** Fund paid internships and scholarships for Aboriginal and female candidates in collaboration with NSW Aboriginal organisations and Business NSW.
- **Apprenticeships and Traineeships:** Establish funded positions across civil, electrical, and project administration disciplines through local Group Training Organisations.
- **Career Progression Pathways:** Provide long-term employment progression opportunities for trainees and interns into ACEnergy or partner organisations.

4. Construction Workforce Accommodation Management

4.1 Principles

- Avoid tourist and private rental accommodation to protect the visitor economy and housing affordability.
- Prioritise purpose-built or managed accommodation options.
- Ensure equitable, safe, and well-managed facilities for workers.

4.2 Accommodation Arrangement ACEnergy has proactively engaged UNE to explore use of its college facilities as the preferred accommodation solution. UNE's existing spare capacity, structured terms, and short-term leasing flexibility make it a viable and lowest-impact option.

UNE has proposed a block model dedicating entire buildings for ACEnergy for the duration, ensuring privacy and operational integrity. They offered guaranteed capacity to accommodate the construction crew of Gara BESS during the entire construction period.

ACEnergy continues to progress conversations with UNE on this matter, which have been ongoing since August 2025.

4.3 Management Measures

- ACEnergy and/or its appointed contractors will implement a **worker code of conduct** and welfare policy to manage noise, traffic, and social behaviour, supporting community wellbeing and fostering social cohesion.
- ACEnergy and/or its appointed contractors will arrange transport to ferry workers between accommodation sites and the project construction site, and key local amenities to reduce traffic congestion and minimise impacts on local road networks.
- ACEnergy and/or its appointed contractors will collaborate with UNE and other local service providers to provide catering and recreation options at accommodation sites wherever practical to reduce local disruption to local services.
- Liaise transparently and regularly with Council and local communities to proactively address any issues that may arise.

5. Socio-Economic Impacts and Local Benefits

5.1 Job Competition and Mitigation

- Stage workforce recruitment to align with local availability.
- Use local labour hire agencies and training providers to reduce pressure on existing businesses.
- Offer short-term upskilling opportunities to local workers to meet project needs.

5.2 Local Spending

- *Support on local businesses via spending on food, retail, and services by workers.*

5.3 Lasting Benefits

- Support local education pathways to careers in the renewable energy sector.

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- Contribute to the development of a skilled regional workforce that can participate in future REZ projects.

6. Cumulative Impacts and Regional Coordination

ACEnergy recognises the cumulative workforce and accommodation pressures within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

6.1 Coordination Measures

- Maintain dialogue with other REZ project proponents to share timelines, workforce numbers, and accommodation availability.
- Coordinate construction sequencing with other project proponents to minimise overlapping workforce peaks, where possible
- Participate in relevant regional working groups to develop shared accommodation or service solutions.

7. Health, Safety and Community Services

ACEnergy will engage with local health and emergency services to assess workforce-related demand and implement mitigation measures, such as:

- On-site First Aid and Health Support: Deploy trained first aid personnel and establish an on-site medical facility to manage minor injuries and health issues, reducing reliance on Armidale Hospital and local clinics.
- Emergency Response Planning: Develop a comprehensive emergency response plan, coordinated with NSW Ambulance, Fire and Rescue NSW, and Armidale Regional Council, to ensure rapid incident response while minimising demands on local emergency services. This includes pre-arranged protocols to divert non-critical cases to on-site or external facilities where appropriate.
- Worker Wellbeing and Mental Health Programs: Implement support programs, including access to telehealth counselling and on-site wellness activities, to promote worker mental health and reduce pressure on local mental health services.
- Worker Insurance: Provide comprehensive worker insurance coverage, including workers' compensation and public liability insurance, to ensure all personnel are protected against workplace injuries and incidents, in compliance with NSW Work Health and Safety (WHS) regulations, thereby reducing potential liability for local services.



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8. Implementation and Review

Phase	Key Actions	Responsibility
Pre-construction	Finalise workforce plan, finalise agreement with UNE accommodation	ACEnergy on behalf of Project Entity
Construction	Implement workforce, accommodation and training measures	Contractors nominated by ACEnergy on behalf of Project Entity
Operation	Maintain local employment and reporting	Project Entity
Review	Reiew of commitments and adaptive measures	Project Entity & Council

9. Conclusion

ACEnergy is committed to delivering local economic and social benefits while minimising adverse accommodation and service impacts during construction.

This Strategy seeks to meet Council's expectations for a balanced approach, while remaining appropriately scoped to reflect the current level of project certainty.