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Offshore wind set to test region

The region's peak industry body **Business Hunter** has welcomed the Hunter Offshore Wind project zone, which could produce the equivalent of the region's fleet of coal-fired power stations.

With the project's community consultation phase officially announced yesterday, Business Hunter CEO, Bob Hawes is urging all stakeholders to engage early in the process to avoid delays.

"Large scale renewable energy projects are critical for the Hunter's energy evolution. With the potential to support one of Australia's largest clean energy projects, this is another clear indication of the role the Hunter will be expected to play in the new energy economy, and the opportunities and challenges that lie before us," said Mr Hawes.

"An efficient and effective consultation and project application and consideration process will ensure we can boost the confidence of commercial investment this project is likely to attract, and provide certainty for businesses who are at the mercy of an increasingly volatile energy market."

Mr Hawes said energy supply was a key concern for the region, and simultaneously, one of its biggest opportunities.

"The opportunities and tasks around manufacturing, securing labour supply and the logistics required to bring a project of this scale to reality will be enormous. Our State Election Platform offers practical steps the government can take to ensure we have a ready pipeline of skilled workers to support these endeavours, including a Hunter New Energy Skills Centre modelled on the Institute of Applied Technology at Meadowbank, and an advanced science and technology academy high school."

"This is a 'once in a generation' opportunity that requires solid foundations to ensure children who are currently at school and considering their future can understand the opportunities available to them in new energy."

Mr Hawes said Business Hunter's Election Platform had also called for strengthening of local supply chains and priority support for businesses wishing to establish or diversify into manufacturing of materials required in renewable energy production, such as solar panels and wind farms.

“Decades of knowledge and capacity building have created an immense energy pedigree in the Hunter. While this offers a solid foundation to build on, our renewable energy ecosystem is still in its infancy and will require support to build momentum and ripen,” said Mr Hawes.

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