Industry Engagement Report

Industry Perspectives on the Path to Clean Energy

WIDE BAY BURNETT

2025

An Australian Government Initiative

Regional Development Australia

Local people creating local opportunities

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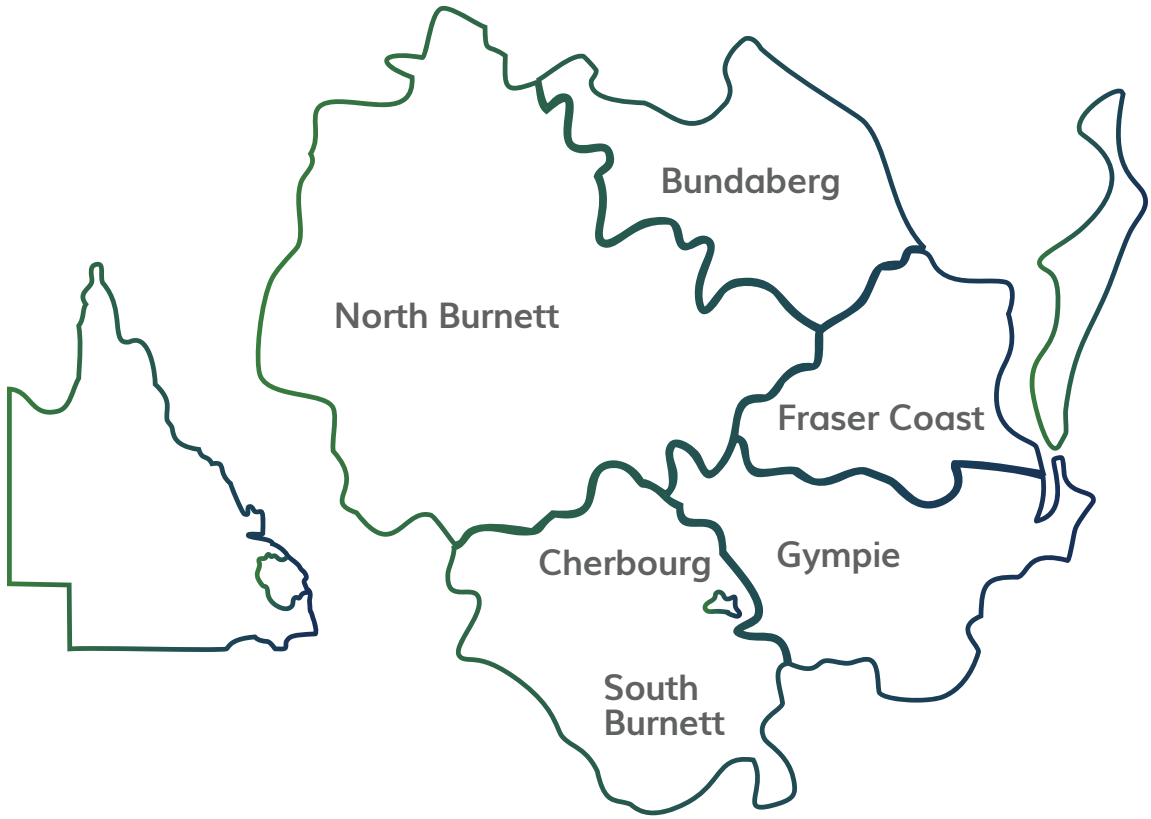


WIDE BAY BURNETT

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

I congratulate Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDAWBB) on the release of this report. It is a great example of the role RDA committees play in facilitating conversations, connections and collaboration across their communities.

Taking a proactive approach to an issue I know is front of mind for many regions – the transition to renewable energy – RDAWBB recognises the importance of local engagement. Understanding local views and priorities is critical to navigating the transition in ways that benefit regional industries, businesses, communities and people.

The report outlines opinions, views and experiences from industry leaders and stakeholders across the region, providing governments and energy operators and developers with useful, direct insights on where the community stands on the transition to renewable energy.

I continue to state the importance of the transition to renewable energy being done with regions, not to regions – reports like these, that seek and showcase the sentiments of local stakeholders, are important contributions to making sure we can collectively achieve this.

Thanks to Bill, Sotera, and the team at RDAWBB, as well as all those who contributed, for delivering this report.

The Hon Kristy McBain MP

Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories

FOREWORD

On behalf of the Board of Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDAWBB), I am pleased to present this report, which builds on the critical conversations and early insights from our 2024 industry engagement on the clean energy transition. As the global shift toward decarbonisation accelerates, businesses in our region stand at a crossroads - facing both exciting opportunities and significant challenges.

Our preliminary engagement emphasised the diverse readiness among industry stakeholders, with many eager to adopt energy solutions that enhance independence from the current system. However, concerns remain over economic impacts and the need for clearer policy direction. Through continued engagement, collaboration, and advocacy, we can help ensure the transition is not only sustainable but also beneficial to businesses, communities, and future generations.

This report captures the perspectives of industry leaders and stakeholders across Wide Bay Burnett, offering valuable insights into the evolving energy landscape and recommendations for pathways forward.

As we navigate this shift together, RDAWBB remains committed to facilitating meaningful dialogue and supporting businesses in their journey toward a resilient and sustainable future.

We thank all stakeholders who contributed their time and expertise to this important initiative, and we look forward to working together to shape a prosperous, clean energy future for our region.

Bill Trevor OAM

Chair, Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett

1. Executive Summary

For Wide Bay industry and business to grow, invest, and create lasting employment, energy must be part of the solution, not the limitation. If we are to secure prosperity and wealth for our region now and into the future, Wide Bay Burnett requires energy that is reliable. Energy that is sustainable. And energy that is cost-effective. Not just some of the time but every hour, every day, all year round. Twenty-four-seven, three-sixty-five.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2024 Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDAWBB) conducted preliminary engagement to assess industry sentiments regarding the clean energy transition. Early insights included the following:

- Mixed readiness
- A strong desire for businesses to implement solutions that increase independence from the current energy system
- Concerns over economic impact
- A need for genuine industry engagement and clearer policy advice

This report presents key insights from a stakeholder engagement initiative undertaken across Wide Bay Burnett to further understand industry experiences and perspectives on the energy transition. With growing momentum toward decarbonisation and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) accountability, the region faces both opportunities and challenges in adapting to a rapidly shifting economic and energy landscape.

Key Findings Include:

Widespread recognition of the energy transition - but limited readiness:

Stakeholders acknowledge the transition is inevitable and already underway. However, many communities feel unprepared for its pace and scale, with concerns around being left behind.

Disconnect between policy and place:

There is a clear misalignment between national/state policy frameworks and the region's economic and social realities. This has created uncertainty, disengagement, and a sense that local voices are not meaningfully included in key decisions.

Barriers to business adoption of renewable technology:

Businesses are motivated to adopt new technologies but face major hurdles - including high upfront costs, unclear policy settings, limited technical support, and lack of access to finance or grants.

Capacity constraints pose serious risks:

Chronic shortages in housing, skilled labour, enabling infrastructure, and social services are already impacting regional growth. Without targeted investment, these pressures could be exacerbated by large-scale transition initiatives.

ESG uptake is uneven and under-supported:

While some larger organisations are taking steps toward ESG readiness, most local businesses lack the tools, guidance, and leadership support to embed ESG in a meaningful and manageable way.

Trust and social license need rebuilding:

Community trust in government and industry remains fragile. Stakeholders consistently called for more transparent, inclusive, and consistent engagement to ensure communities feel genuinely heard and have ownership of transition pathways.

2. Purpose & Objectives

PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

Why We Engaged

RDAWBB recognises the critical importance of engaging directly with regional industries to capture their unique perspectives on the renewable energy transition. Understanding local priorities, challenges, and opportunities allows us to ensure that strategies are tailored, inclusive, and responsive to on-the-ground realities. This insight not only informs more effective policy and program design but also strengthens regional readiness to embrace clean energy solutions in ways that support long-term economic growth and resilience.

Objectives:

- Identify challenges and opportunities in renewable energy adoption.
- Gather feedback to inform industry recommendations and advocacy.
- Provide data-driven insights to guide business planning and investment.
- Assess industry capability, enablers, and barriers including:
  - Behind-the-meter solutions
  - Climate reporting
  - Baseload reliability
  - Return on Investment (ROI), cost, sustainability, technology
- Understand sentiment around mandatory climate reporting.

3. Engagement Approach

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Methodology

Over a four-week period in April 2025, RDA Wide Bay Burnett engaged Engaged Outcomes to consult with businesses and stakeholders across the region. Engagement explored three key questions relating to the opportunities, risks, and expectations associated with the renewable energy transition and ESG readiness.

Consultation activities included:

- In-person workshops and forums in Kingaroy, Murgon, Gayndah, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Maryborough, and Gympie (48 attendees).
- Virtual sessions (both general and industry-specific) with a total of 31 participants.
- An online survey open to the public and promoted via RDAWBB channels (95 responses).
- Individual interviews with 15 business owners and representatives.

In total, 158 people were engaged, representing sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, transport, tourism, professional services, education, health, and local government. Businesses ranged in size and were located across the Wide Bay Burnett, providing a broad regional perspective.

4. Key Themes

KEY ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Policy Stability and Increased Regulation

Uncertainty in energy policy has led to planning paralysis and stalled investment. Businesses are calling for consistent, bipartisan direction and a stronger voice in shaping practical, workable solutions that reflect industry realities. At the same time, there is growing demand for clearer regulations and stronger safeguards to minimise project impacts, support fair benefit-sharing, and ensure long-term community value.

> *"Policy needs to be for the good of all people: Long term outlook, instead of guided by who is in power at the time."*

Demand for Reliable, Affordable, and Resilient Energy Supply

Across all sessions, and in survey data, businesses consistently emphasised the need for dependable and cost-effective energy to remain competitive. There is clear interest in self-reliance and decentralised solutions like solar and battery storage; however, adoption is often constrained by high upfront costs, grid limitations, and uncertainty around return on investment.

> *"Affordability and reliability of supply. Renewable energy projects should be rolled out in stages, so that reliability of supply isn't affected. The huge jumps in electricity prices are hurting families and businesses and there is no appreciable benefit to the environment."*

Access to Trusted Information & Education

There is a strong demand for practical, locally relevant, and easy-to-understand information and training, delivered by trusted organisations. From building basic energy literacy to understanding the drivers of the energy transition, regional implications, and the specifics of technologies and individual developments, better access to clear information would reduce uncertainty, support industry participation, and enable more confident decision-making.

> *"Our communities have lost our trusted source: there are not more newspapers, so where do businesses get their information? People do not know what to believe. What is a credible source of information?"*

Barriers to Technology Adoption

Businesses expressed concern about a range of barriers to adopting new technologies, including risks (e.g. battery fires, insurance considerations, electric vehicle (EV) limitations), affordability, long payback periods, and uncertainty around viability and reliability. Grid infrastructure limitations and lack of clarity on integration further constrains uptake.

> *"We require reliable 24/7 power supply to enable heavy manufacturing at our facilities and that of our supply chains. We are not sure that renewables offer this at present."*

Economic Opportunity is There but Needs Enabling

While there is cautious optimism around income diversification (e.g. hosting infrastructure, agrivoltaics) and supply chain participation (e.g. construction, fencing, maintenance), access to these opportunities is blurry and remains uneven. For many businesses, engaging with these development opportunities raises moral and ethical dilemmas, particularly in the context of emotionally charged local debates.

> *"If done well, this could be a once-in-a-generation opportunity for regional renewal."*

Business and Community Cannot Be Separated

There were consistent concerns about the broader social, environmental, and economic impacts of the energy transition on the region's communities. Despite a wide range of views, recurring issues included community division, land use conflict, biodiversity loss, visual and lifestyle impacts, and a sense that the transition is being done to communities - not with them.

> *"The transition is happening to us, not with us."*

5. Identifying Barriers, Addressing Concerns, Unlocking Opportunities

OPPORTUNITIES

Identified Opportunities

Income Diversification for Landholders

Hosting renewable infrastructure and engaging in carbon farming is creating valuable income diversification pathways for landholders. These arrangements offer long-term consistent income and open up access to emerging natural capital markets which are expected to grow in significance.

> *"There's potential for new income streams for landholders, but no one's explaining the risks clearly."*

Supply Chain Participation and Employment Opportunities

The development phase of renewable energy projects is creating supply chain opportunities and jobs for trades, contractors, and regional suppliers. Local businesses like bakeries, pubs, and accommodation providers also benefit from the influx of workers during construction phases. While construction is typically short-term, there's growing recognition of longer-term opportunities in areas like maintenance, civil works, fencing, and land management, especially when local procurement is prioritised.

> *"There are existing workforce shortages in skilled trades, with businesses already struggling to fill roles. If renewables projects go ahead, they are pulling from the same workforce pool. How are they going to meet this? Are they bringing in unskilled or already qualified people?"*

Agrivoltaics and Dual Land Use

Integrating solar generation with grazing or cropping is viewed as an untapped opportunity. Common overseas, these dual-use models are being trialled elsewhere to maximise land productivity and reduce the perceived conflict between agriculture and energy generation.

Evidence of the environmental and health impacts of large-scale developments, including effects on wildlife, noise pollution, and the spread of microplastics, is required to provide investment confidence to landholders and communities.

> *"I would need a detailed understanding of how it works and impacts to my business prior to being involved."*

Greater Energy Self-Sufficiency

On-farm and local renewable generation for businesses, when paired with storage, offers the potential for greater energy efficiency, reduced power bills and more reliable energy supply for farms and businesses.

> *"We would certainly be interested in exploring an energy collaboration further and understanding how hospitals / health services in other areas may have participated in something similar, and managed risks and benefits as custodians of critical infrastructure."*

Potential for Community-Owned Energy

There is curiosity and strong interest in models that keep control and profits within the community such as co-operatives, microgrids, and community energy groups. These are seen as ways to increase local buy-in, reinvest profits locally, and ensure equitable distribution of benefits.

Improved Energy Resilience During Natural Disasters

In areas prone to drought, bushfire, or flood, energy resilience is critical. Renewables paired with battery backup are being seen as part of the mix for continuity of operations and local emergency response capacity.

Better Use of Built Structures

There is strong support for solar installations on rooftops, car parks, and other built environments, which avoid land use conflicts associated with greenfield developments. While structural or grid limitations can complicate retrofitting, these options are more broadly accepted by businesses and residents.

Energy Literacy

There is strong desire for accessible resources and reliable information to support businesses in making informed decisions and investments into suitable clean energy technologies and energy efficiency, coupled with clear policy advice from governments.

Clear guidance on various energy opportunities, ranging from individual site solutions to collaborative private energy grids, alongside ROI is needed to enable businesses to adopt and implement practical, reliable and cost-effective solutions.

Barriers & Concerns

Community Division and Mistrust

Stakeholders consistently reported damage to community cohesion from industrial renewable energy developments, and concern about the potential of permanent damage.

Many stakeholders feel their communities are being excluded from decision-making around renewable energy projects. Poor consultation and inconsistent communication have created space for misinformation and resentment, leading to polarised opinions and community division.

Projects proposed on prime agricultural land or near residential areas were commonly raised as a concern. Stakeholders linked this to issues like visual impacts, noise, lifestyle disruption, physical and mental health concerns and lack of genuine local benefit, alongside broader issues like food security.

There is a persistent belief that communities endure the disruption but rarely see the promised jobs, infrastructure, or long-term benefits that are promised.

> *"There's a real fear that large-scale developments will erode our community identity - we're farmers here, not just a patch of land for someone else's project."*

Energy Pricing and Reliability

Despite the promise of cheaper energy from renewables, businesses report ongoing electricity price increases, with one stakeholder citing a 70% rise over the past two years. Reliability is also a major concern, especially during extreme weather events. This is driving interest in off-grid and self-sufficient solutions, but many doubt that renewables alone can deliver the reliability required for future energy needs.

Stakeholders expressed concerns that existing grid infrastructure was insufficient for the clean energy transition, which would inevitably drive electricity prices even higher. This concern was also closely linked to perceptions that the government's approach to upgrading energy assets is uncoordinated and inefficient, which would further impact electricity costs.

> *"Access to reliable affordable energy is critical—we're open to renewables, but it has to go beyond philosophy and work on the ground."*

Environmental Risks

Environmental concerns were widespread, with risks cited including biodiversity loss, disrupted ecosystems, water table impacts, and potential biosecurity breaches. Without careful land management and appropriate project locations, stakeholders believe projects will cause lasting damage.

> *"Biosecurity risks – when people are coming and going from the land to develop projects, biosecurity is not maintained. The large corporations talk about it but "don't do it" in practice."*

ESG Not a Priority

In Wide Bay Burnett, ESG and sustainability were not identified as issues of interest or concern for customers or communities as a whole, with some stakeholders perceiving ESG as being mainly "ideological".

Not For Profit stakeholders pointed out that households and businesses focusing on survival have little capacity to engage with broader environmental or governance goals.

> *"The general public don't care about ESG."*

Impacts of Development

Stakeholders expressed concern that large-scale projects are contributing to housing shortages and rising prices, making it increasingly difficult, especially for vulnerable residents, to find affordable accommodation.

While local hospitality and accommodation providers may benefit from the influx of workers, many in the region feel the added pressure on services outweighed the gains. Additionally, the projects can disrupt the local workforce, as employees shift to higher-paying development jobs, leaving local businesses struggling to retain staff.

> *"We bear all the brunt of the development, host the infrastructure, so people in New Farm can feel good about saving the planet while they sip their lattes."*

Local Procurement Opportunities

Many businesses struggle to take advantage of supply chain opportunities due to limited experience, capability or capacity. Common concerns include being unable to meet tender requirements (e.g. volume, ESG standards, or compliance) and only learning about opportunities after contracts are awarded. Without the time, skills, or internal capacity to manage complex tendering, compliance, and reporting processes, many local businesses feel unprepared and unable to compete effectively, even when work is available.

> *"Businesses are very misguided and confused about ESG. Many don't know what it actually means and what it means for their business. For example, they have taken contracts and then been asked to show their records and not known what it is."*

Economic Loss and Viability

Stakeholders pointed out that many jobs in the renewable sector are short-term and cannot replace the full-time, well-paid roles being lost in fossil fuel industries. There were conversations about the viability or the reasons for transitioning from coal. There were also concerns about the loss of state royalties from coal, which may impact government revenue, leading to increased taxation elsewhere and a loss of investment into state infrastructure (such as roads, schools and hospitals).

> *"How can you argue that exploiting coal overseas balances removing most coal powered stations."*

> *"If it ain't broken, why fix it?" This country was built on power from coal."*

> *"Why are we paying the penalty for the development and emissions of other countries."*

Net Zero and Wide Bay Burnett

Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for cradle-to-grave planning for energy projects, with clear oversight of what the energy transition means regional, for both businesses and communities.

There was frustration about what was perceived as a piecemeal and poorly coordinated process, and a lack of clarity about the end goal. There was also concern about a lack of forward planning for infrastructure as it reaches end of life, which has been fuelling fears of future negative environmental, social and financial impacts.

> *"What change model is the government currently using to effect and implement effective change? Renewable energy change is being done by the seat of their pants "it's a thought bubble."*

> *"One of the key challenges is that renewable energy is not yet widely supported or positively perceived by local council, some landowners, and members of the community. Misinformation and a lack of understanding about climate science and the benefits of reducing fossil fuel use highlight the need for ongoing, respectful community education and engagement."*

6. Readiness & Capability

Readiness & Capability in the Clean Energy Transition

Cautious Approach to New Technologies

Businesses are approaching clean technologies with caution, citing concerns about integration and serviceability, uncertain payback periods, and long-term reliability. The fast pace of innovation adds further hesitation, with fears that today's investment could become tomorrow's stranded asset.

> *"We've got 64 vehicles, and we looked into switching to hybrids—it's about $5k more upfront, which adds up. EVs raise even more questions: what's the cost of the charging infrastructure, especially for a business like ours that's always out in the regions? Would we be charging overnight—what does that do to the grid? And where's the secure infrastructure for that? Outreach is core to what we do, so for now, sticking with petrol just makes more sense."*

Structural Barriers for Tenants

Renters and leaseholders face significant challenges in participating in the energy transition. Landlords are often unwilling to invest in upgrades such as solar or batteries, leaving tenants unable to access cost savings or sustainability benefits. Conversely, tenants are hesitant to invest in technology that requires complex approvals from landlords or body corporates, at their own expense, especially when ownership of the asset remains uncertain at the end of a lease term.

ESG Readiness and Capability

Widespread Confusion and Low Awareness

Many businesses remain unclear on what ESG entails or how it applies to them. Some have entered contracts with ESG requirements without fully understanding their obligations. There is confusion around definitions, relevance, and how to get started.

Time, staffing, and expertise limitations are common barriers, and many businesses report that ESG is not a current priority for their customers. As a result, ESG is largely seen as a cost with uncertain benefits.

> *"Half the street in this town has businesses closed – they aren't thinking of ESG. Businesses are trying to feed their families, that's their focus."*

> *"Understanding ESG creates business advantages."*

Perceptions of ESG as a Compliance Burden

ESG and climate reporting are widely viewed as compliance-heavy, top-down requirements relevant mainly to exporters, government contractors, or those in large corporate supply chains. While local interest and demand remains limited, pressure to engage with ESG is growing from financiers, insurers, and supply chain partners.

> *"Customers do not have an expectation for this. They are focused on surviving and living week to week. Only a small group of our clients would understand what ESG is, but it's not a priority for them."*

Three Stages of Readiness

Manufacturing Skills Queensland identified three broad levels of ESG maturity for businesses in the Wide Bay Burnett:

1.	2.	3.
Highly mature Typically those supplying corporates or government (with some NFPs as the exception)	**Aware but unsure** Aware of ESG but uncertain about how to act	**Overwhelmed or under-resourced** Unable to prioritise ESG right now.

Many businesses are already undertaking work that aligns with ESG principles but don't recognise its relevance to reporting.

> *"Unless a business is involved in Government Tenders, seeking investment or exporting, it is highly unlikely they will see any return on ESG reporting."*

Cascading Obligations

As larger organisations prepare for ESG reporting, expectations are filtering down through supply chains. However, most SMEs are unaware of these changes. Businesses often encounter ESG requirements only after winning contracts, leaving them unprepared and at a disadvantage.

> *"A company we supply in Europe are starting to ask for the provenance of our product, and for us to report on it. This will mean individual farmers will have to have the systems and processes in place to record data for individual beasts and provide it up the supply chain."*

Strong Need for Practical, Supported Pathways

Businesses are seeking straightforward, accessible ESG tools, not complex frameworks. They want accessible support, clear reporting expectations, and real-world examples of what good practice looks like. Current training often focuses on legislative compliance (e.g. Scope 1 emissions), but many businesses are wanting hands-on, practical guidance.

> *"I'm concerned there will be increased scrutiny on farmers and their practices because of these ESG requirements."*

7. Key Enablers Driving Industry Adoption of Clean Energy

Enablers of Adoption

Trusted Messengers

Information delivered by trusted local sources such as peers, community leaders, or neutral organisations has significantly greater impact than messages from corporate, government, or proponent campaigns. In-person events like field days and workshops led by trusted facilitators are especially effective in building understanding and credibility.

> *"DPI used to be trusted when they used to run field days."*

Policy Stability

This issue carries particular weight for owners of arable farmland, whose livelihoods are deeply tied to the land. They face the dual challenge of potential income from integrating clean energy initiatives on farm, while ensuring that land management, productivity and biosecurity is protected for future generations.

> *"Business is at the mercy of which ever government is in power."*

Incentives

Targeted incentives for renewable technologies such as solar, batteries, EV infrastructure, microgrids, and agtech, alongside local pilot programs are critical to accelerating adoption. Stakeholders consistently identified trust in the technology, long payback periods and high upfront capital costs as major barriers.

> *"There aren't many government incentives available to businesses to implement solutions – lots of farms are not making money and investment into RE tech is not viable (rising cost of equipment etc.)."*

> *"It's hard to go green when you're trying to stay out of the red."*

Tailored Training and Support

Businesses need access to training and support that is accessible, affordable and locally relevant. Programs tailored to regional contexts and specific industry needs are far more effective than generic information or compliance-driven tools.

> *"An easy-to-follow guide and requirements on 'how to' implement reporting for 'mandatory climate reporting'. Business Chamber QLD have information and support for this. A similar resource could be emulated."*

Utilising Existing Infrastructure

There is strong support for integrating renewables into existing infrastructure, including rooftops and car parks, and for mandating this in new developments. These approaches minimise land use conflicts and offer faster, lower-risk implementation aligned with community expectations.

> *"There's support for use of solar on existing roofs, car parks and other structures that would be better suited during summer – could this be used on these existing spaces?"*

8. Barriers to Progress

Barriers to Progress

Conflicting Messages and Mistrust

Conflicting narratives from government, developers, and interest groups are creating confusion and mistrust. The lack of a clear, trusted source of information is leading many to disengage entirely.

> *"I just don't know what is true. Everyone says different things and there is lots on Facebook that is confusing."*

Policy Uncertainty

Uncertainty around energy policy at federal, state, and local levels is creating planning paralysis. Fear of sudden changes is making businesses hesitant to commit to long-term investments.

> *"It influences our decision making because if we don't have reliable power supply, we cannot compete in Australia and we will have to move offshore."*

Financial Barriers to Adoption

The initial capital required for clean energy technology adoption is a significant barrier, particularly for small businesses. Long payback periods - such as six years - are seen as non-viable by many. A lack of government financial support further compounds the issue.

> *"Reliability and cost. Lack of understanding around options available and uncertainty of how to find out. Potential misinformation that may be around."*

Battery Concerns

Concerns about battery safety, lifespan, and replacement costs are common and often deter uptake. These fears are heightened in areas without access to technical support or servicing capability. Risk and insurance considerations for battery storage systems were also raised as an area that requires clarity.

Reliability Concerns

Businesses require consistent, 24/7 access to affordable energy. Many are not confident that current renewable technologies can meet operational reliability needs.

> *"We have considered swapping to electric forklifts, but haven't because they create a new risk. What if someone forgets to charge them overnight?"*

Risk-averse Business Mindset

Many businesses, particularly those operating with limited resources, take a cautious, short-term approach. Transitioning to new technologies is seen as risky and non-essential in the face of immediate financial pressures. This hesitancy is amplified by the traditionally conservative nature of the region, where change is often approached with skepticism and practicality, especially when the perceived benefits are unclear or long-term.

> *"I'd rather invest in equipment that I know will make money, like tractors, instead of equipment that will save money, like RE tech."*

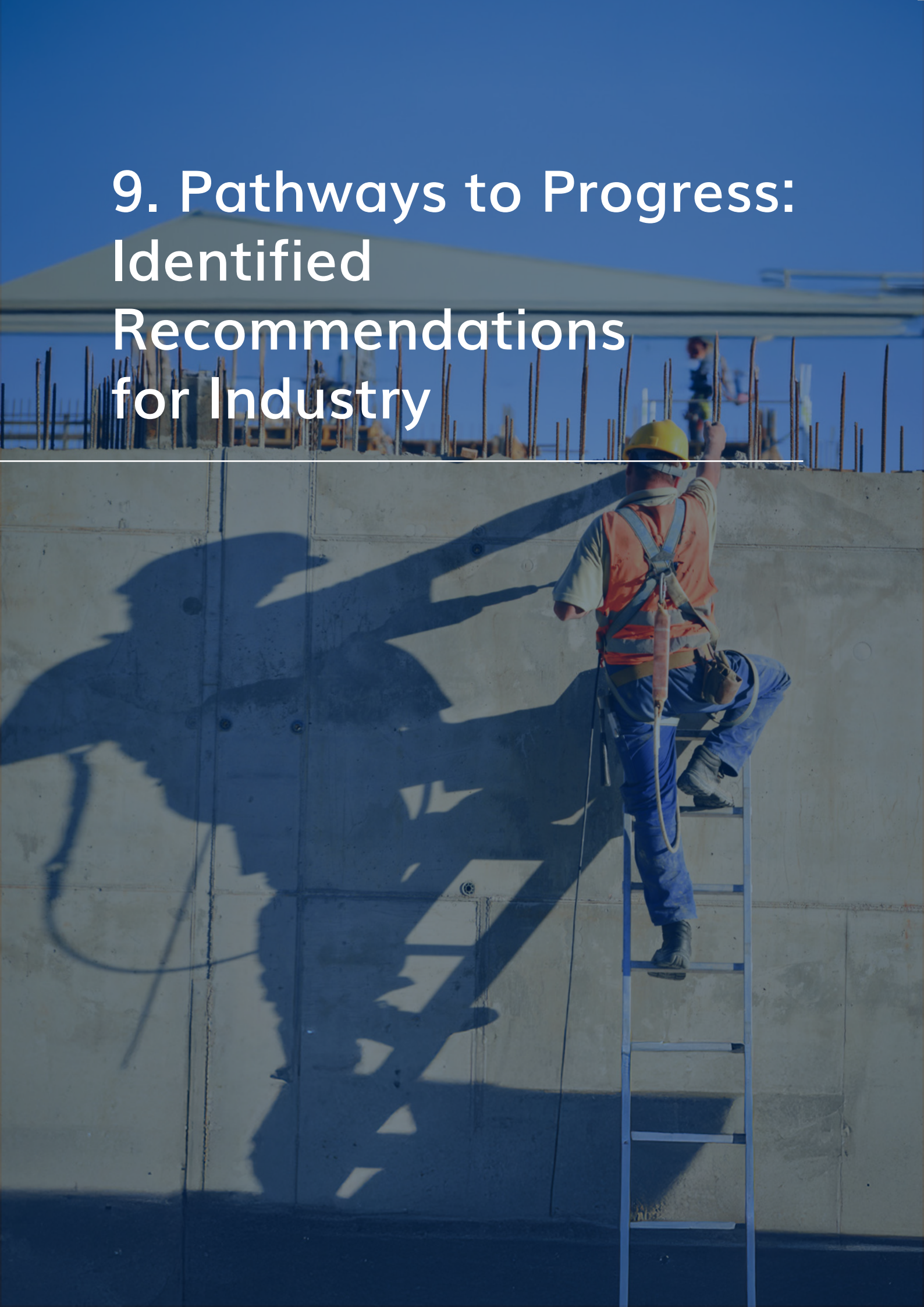
Infrastructure Limitations

Infrastructure constraints, particularly in regional and remote areas are a major barrier to renewable energy uptake, even where interest is high. Limited grid capacity often prevents new connections or the ability to export surplus energy.

Businesses and landholders report delays, restrictions, and slow utility response times. Even willing adopters are facing setbacks due to supply chain bottlenecks and utility slowdowns such as Ergon not releasing essential grid connection parts.

> *"I am keeping my legacy equipment that uses more power, because the new equipment is requiring new transmission infrastructure which the business would have to fund. (eg updates to transformers)."*

9. Pathways to Progress: Identified Recommendations for Industry



IDENTIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged from engagement with regional stakeholders and reflect both immediate needs and longer-term priorities.

Policy Certainty & Advocacy for Regional Needs

- Consistently advocate with local, state and federal politicians and government stakeholders for bipartisan, stable energy policy, and ESG reporting frameworks that reduce investment risk.
- Collaborate with other RDAs to amplify shared regional priorities and advocate with one voice on business support incentives and adjustments (including tax incentives) that support local business investment.

> *"I would like the government to pick a position and stick to it. I would like resources to help me be more independent from the energy generators, that adds value to my business and not the landlord's commercial property asset."*

Advocate for Tailored Support

- Develop incentives and support programs to support business uptake and adoption of efficient, reliable and effective clean energy sources (eg. solar & batteries).
- Develop tailored incentive programs for tenant-operated businesses (e.g. shared rooftop solar, battery leasing, split-incentive solutions for body corporates).
- Support primary producers already using off-grid tech with resources and subsidies to scale, integrate storage, and improve ROI.
- Establish a Renewable Energy Business Hub (similar to a business incubator) to serve as a central support platform – a 'one stop shop' offering:
  - Mentoring, grant access, and expert advice to support your business around energy
  - Help with ESG reporting and tender writing
  - Maturity assessments for energy and ESG
  - Tiered resources (beginner, intermediate, advanced)
  - Access to project proponents to explore supply chain and workforce opportunities.

Energy Cost and ROI Forecasting

- Partner with energy providers or research institutions to develop business-friendly energy cost scenario tools (e.g. ROI calculators, forecast models). If already available, share through business networks.

"We were lucky to be able to get a detailed feasibility study funded by our state department, which not everyone can do. But if more generic modelling and information were available to people to help them understand the typical costs, benefits and risks, that would be helpful. Or a resource like an online tool / calculator (similar to a loan calculator) that enables you to input data and get estimates to aid understanding decision making."

Trusted Information & Education

- Partner with trusted organisations to deliver energy literacy programs in accessible easy format (including understanding all energy efficiency measures to reduce costs, alongside benefits of transitioning).
- Collaborate with trusted organisations to run short-form events or field days that combine storytelling and tech demonstrations to make the transition real and relatable. Program and support services that are available would be shared and representatives available on the day.
- Partner with trusted local organisations to establish and fund 'transition ambassadors' from different business segments to share credible, success story lived insights. These should also made available online.
- Develop a simple visual region specific "transition roadmap" explaining:
  - Current approved project pipelines for renewable energy projects
  - Regional projects 'forecast' (e.g. showing the status of a renewable energy project as planned, commenced, commissioned etc)
  - Current and upcoming business opportunities available for local suppliers and workers.

"Reliable science-based or example-based information from an organisation hub or a trustworthy website."

"Any info that does not have a Bias - difficult to find facts - Political area a waste of time, Agenda driven research is not helpful."

Landuse & Co-existence

- Collaborate with existing trusted experts to provide education and promote co-existence resources (e.g. agrivoltaics, Queensland Farmers Federation Handbook).
- Partner to deliver practical sessions on RE-agriculture co-existence models, including biosecurity and biodiversity best practices.
- Support field days that showcase the opportunities and challenges of renewable energy both small scale 'off grid' examples alongside industrial development opportunities to allow informed decision making.

End of Life and De-commissioning

- Advocate for clear regulatory guidance for decommissioning pathways and recycling infrastructure.
- Share case studies of good practice in project wrap-up and rehabilitation.
- Explore recycling business opportunities & available funding opportunities.

> *"How-to guide - where to get the info, how to compile, advice on good record keeping to make the process easier ongoing."*

ESG-Ready Support

- If doesn't already exist, advocate for the creation of a practical ESG starter toolkit with templates (including a maturity assessment to establish a baseline), FAQs, and examples relevant to regional industries (e.g. food, ag, tourism, manufacturing).
- Advocate for an incentive program to support upskilling and business readiness.
- Promote existing programs like the Manufacturing Skills Queensland's ESG course (and any other existing programs).
- Promote case studies of SMEs gaining advantage through early ESG alignment including short free "ESG 101" webinars or lunch-and-learns, co-hosted with industry bodies, showing how to get started without being overwhelmed, and showcasing success stories / lived experience.
- Provide expert advisory support to help businesses begin their ESG journey.

Support for Tender Readiness

- Audit existing programs available to support small business internal expertise to complete complex tenders to access supply chain opportunities.

Workforce Support

- Facilitate collaboration between project proponents and local business to find innovative local solutions to improve workforce continuity during development. E.g. secondment or staff-sharing arrangements that allow skill transfer between businesses and projects.

Support for Improved Not for Profit (NFP) Readiness and Decision Making

- Work with partners like QCOSS to support board governance training and strategic decision-making capacity to support volunteer boards to make effective future focused energy decisions.
- Advocate that government funding through tenders and service agreement arrangements could drive adoption of net zero and ESG outcomes. Expectations need to be clear, up front, and include funding to build the internal capacity of businesses.
- Partnering with QCOSS provide access to sector specific tools and guidance to help NFPs engage meaningfully in the energy transition.

10. Conclusion & Next Steps

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Path Forward

To enable Wide Bay Burnett's industry sectors to fully engage with and benefit from the clean energy transition, stakeholders have highlighted the importance of place-based planning, cohesive governance, targeted capacity building, and transparent community engagement.

This report seeks to empower decision-makers by amplifying regional voices and providing insights that support the development of transition strategies that are locally responsive, socially inclusive, and economically resilient.

Charting the Road Ahead

Next Steps, Priority Actions & Regional Momentum for the Energy Transition:

- Develop an evidence-based advocacy strategy that reflects local insights and priorities, to influence policy and attract investment that supports regional needs.
- Share these findings with all levels of government and advocate for consideration in future planning and decision-making processes.

11. Appendix: Audit of Programs and Resources

APPENDIX

Appendix 1 – Audit of programs and resources

TOPIC	ORGANISATION
Australian Government Policy & Regulatory Frameworks	**Australian Government Climate Change Commitments**
	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)
	National Renewable Energy Supply Chain Action Plan
	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
	Australian Energy Regulator
	Australian Energy Market Operator
Queensland Government Policy & Regulatory Frameworks	**Queensland Treasury Renewable Energy Zones**
	Queensland Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund
	Queensland Planning Framework for Renewable Energy
	Coexistence Queensland
	Energy Queensland
Funding Programs and Industry/ Residential Subsidies	**Australian Renewable Energy Agency**
	DCCEEW
	Queensland Renewable Energy Zones (QREZ)
	Business Queensland
Energy Literacy	**Business Chamber Queensland**
	The Energy Charter
	Coexistence Queensland
	Queensland Electricity Users Network
	Queensland Government
Environment Sustainability and Governance (ESG) Literacy	**Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development**
	Manufacturing Sustainability Benchmark Program | Business Queensland
	Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning
	Business Chamber Queensland

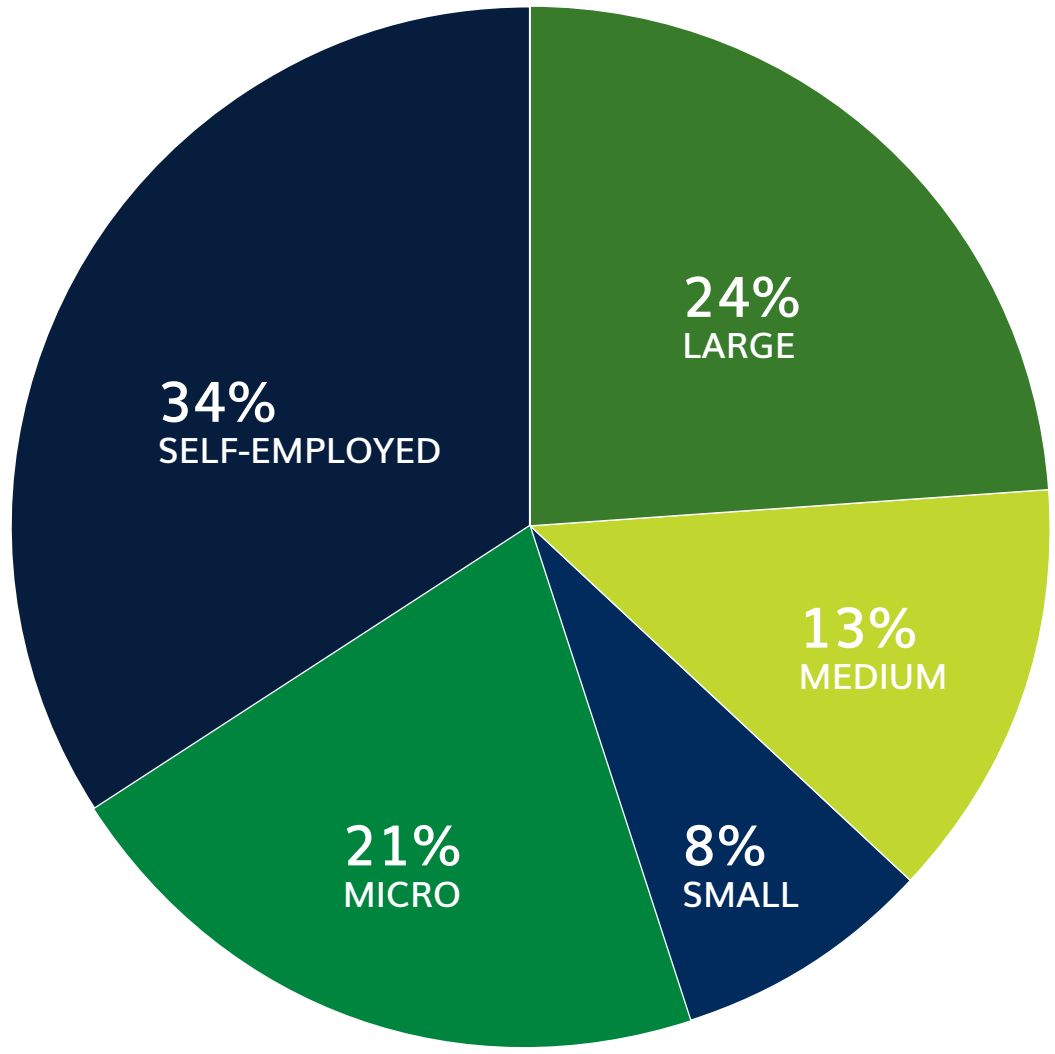
Resources	**Australian Renewable Energy Agency**
	DCCEEW
	Business Queensland
	Coexistence Queensland
	Re-Alliance
	Queensland Farmers Federation
	Energy Information Service for Landholders
	QFF Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit + Webinars
Interested Stakeholders	**DCCEEW**
	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
	Queensland Treasury + other relevant agencies
	Coexistence Queensland
	Wide Bay Burnett Region of Councils
	Bundaberg Region
	Cherbourg
	Fraser Coast
	Gympie Region
	North Burnett Region
	South Burnett Region
	Burnett Inland Economic Development Organisation
	Burnett Mary Regional Group
	Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC)

Interested Stakeholders	*Chambers of Commerce:* **Bundaberg Chamber of Commerce** **Home - Hervey Bay Chamber of Commerce** **Kingaroy Chamber of Commerce** **Gympie - Chamber of Commerce** **Maryborough Chamber of Commerce** **Tiaro Chamber of Commerce**
	Re-Alliance
	Queensland Energy Users Network
	AusIndustry
	Manufacturing Skills Queensland
	Regional Development Australia Queensland
	Various Industry Member Organsiations: **Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers** **Bundaberg Cane Growers** **Bundaberg Ag-Food and Fibre Alliance** **Wide Bay Burnett Environment Council**
	Queensland Council of Social Services

12. Industry Survey Data 2025

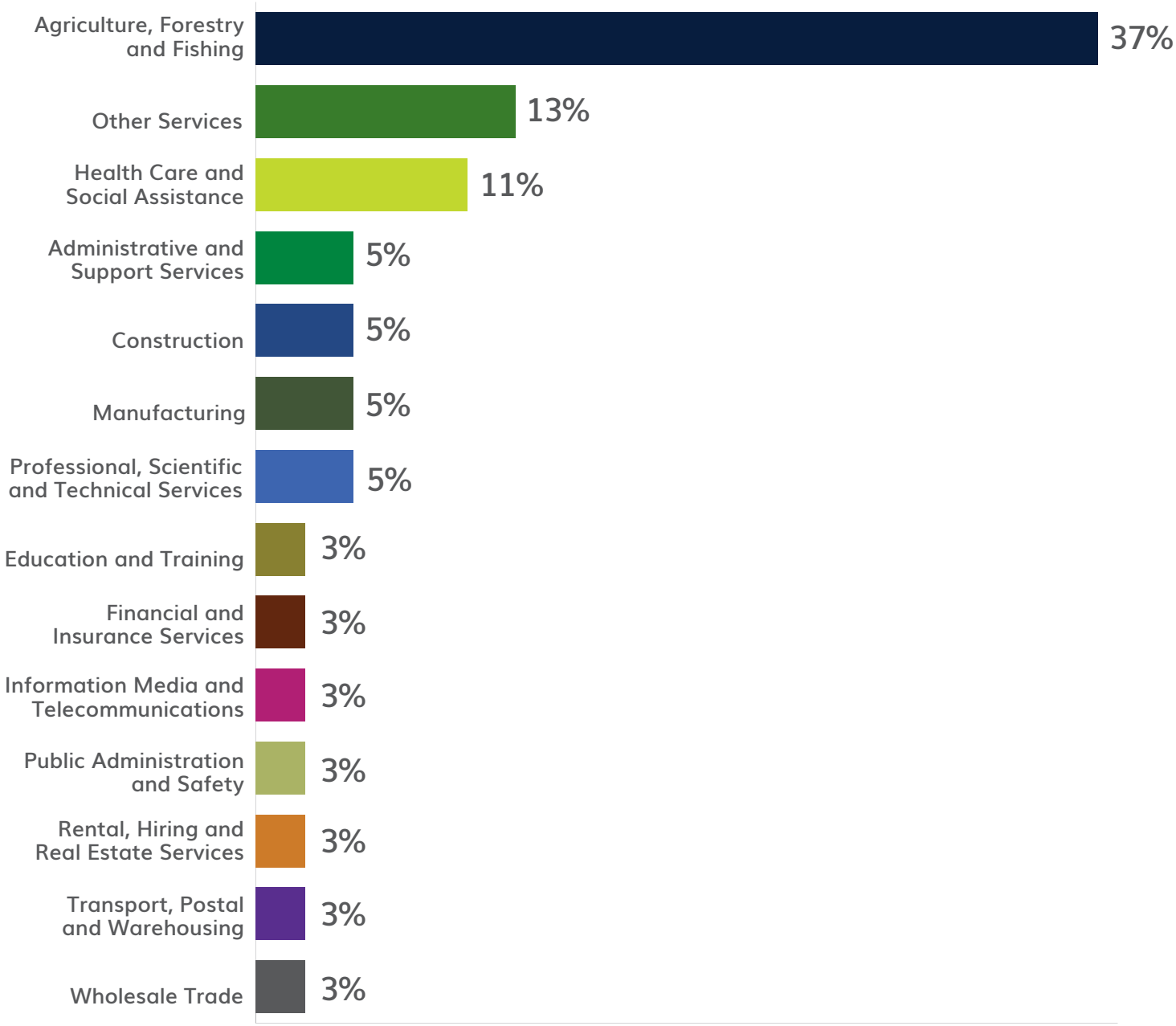
SURVEY DATA RESULTS

Q1. *What is the size of your business?*

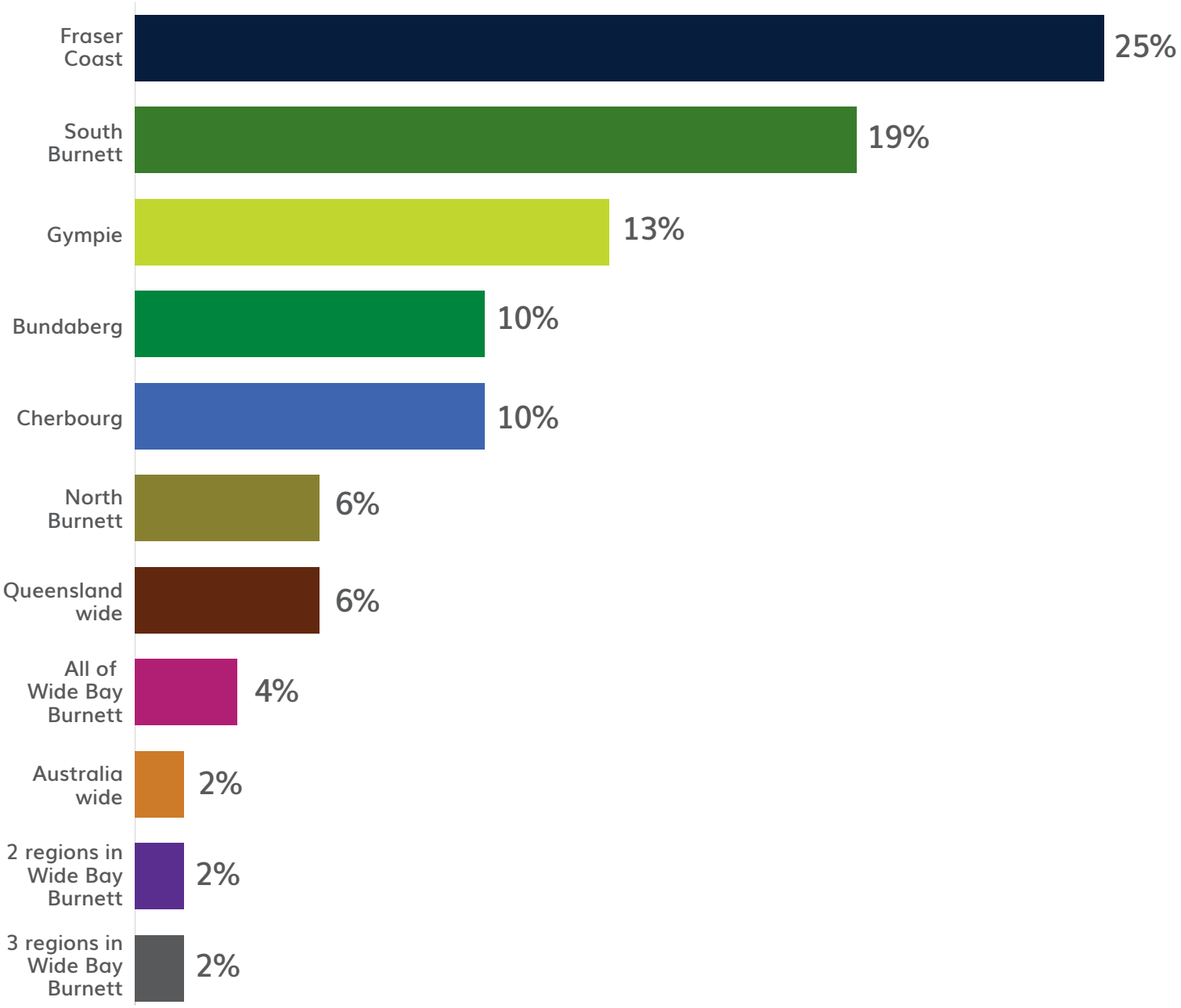


- Large *(200+ employees)*
- Medium *(20-199 employees)*
- Small *(5-19 employees)*
- Micro *(1-4 employees)*
- Self-employed *(sole-trader)*

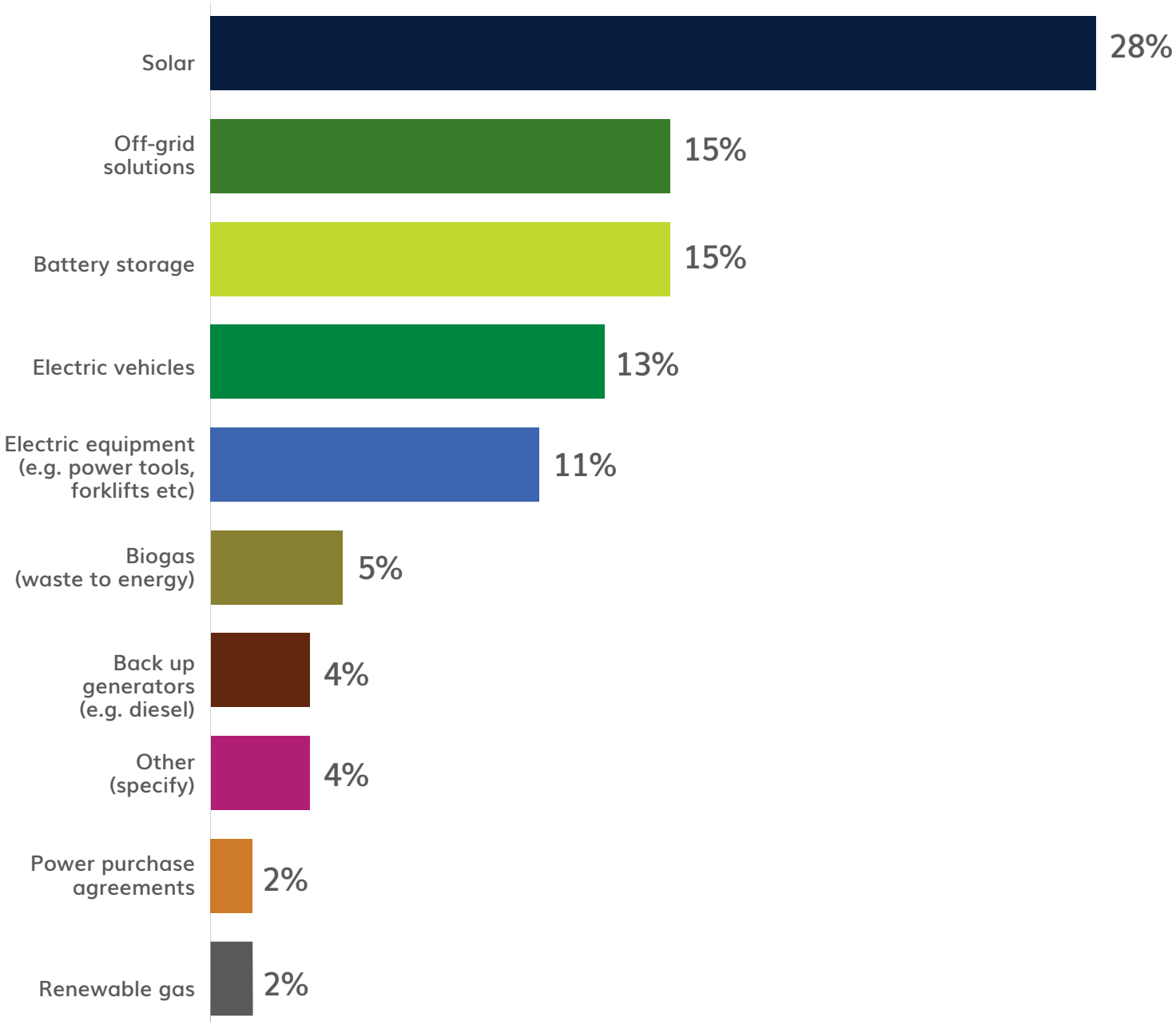
Q2. *What industry sector does your business operate in?*



Q3. *What region does your business operate in?*



Q4. *Which of the following energy solutions have you considered for your business?*

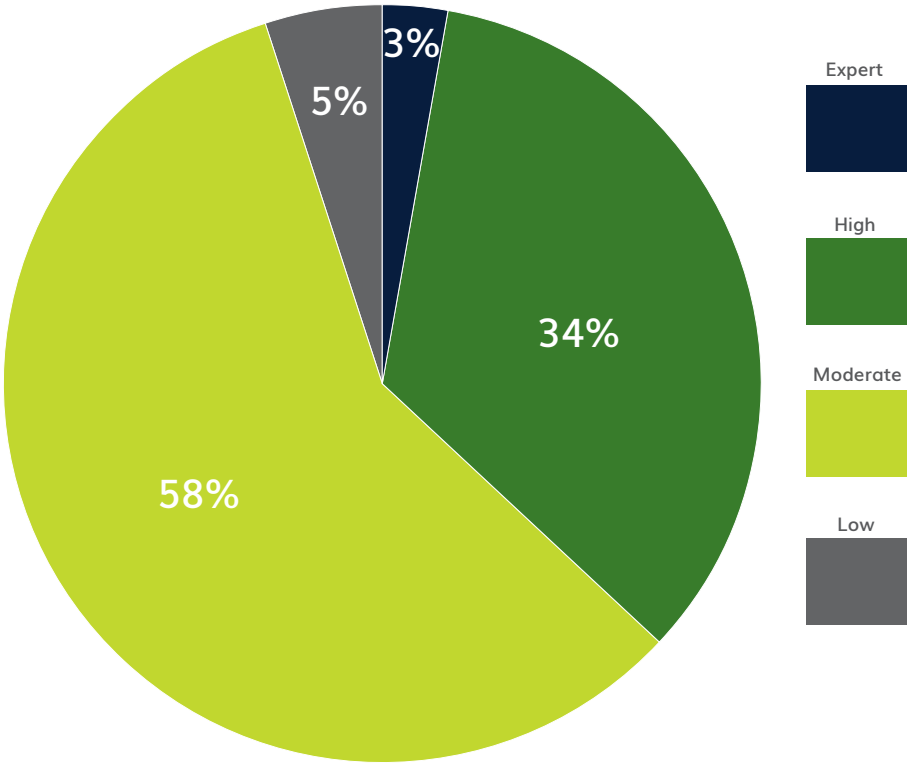


"We use rechargeable electric power tools and have rooftop solar on our premises."

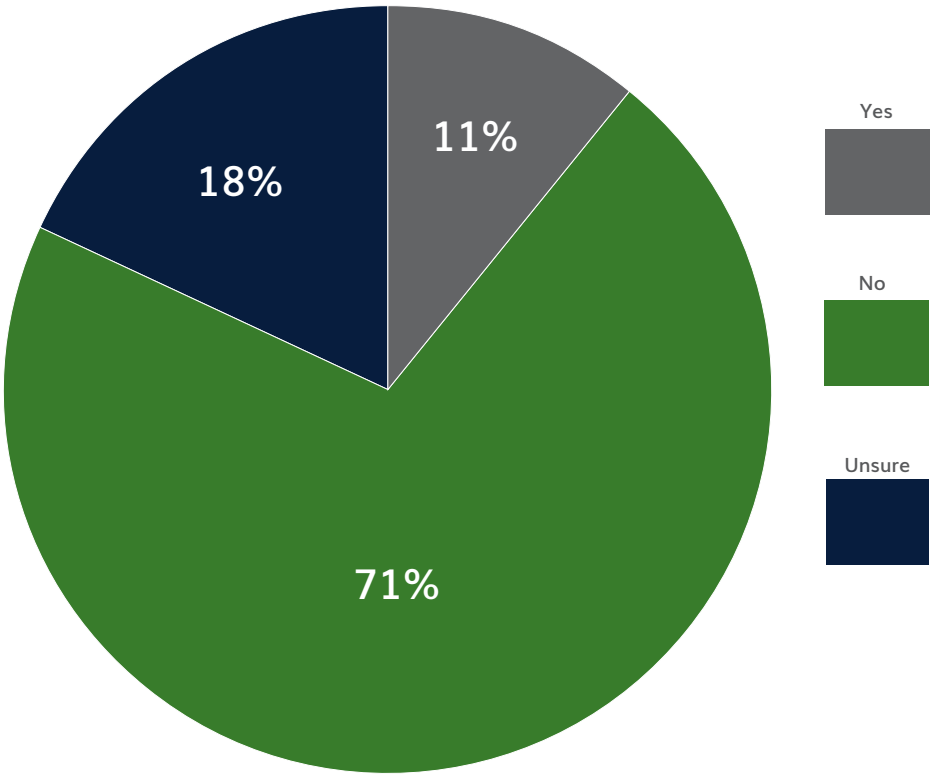
"Hybrid vehicles for our fleet."

"Full changeover to LED lighting for better efficiency."

Q5. *How would you describe your current level of knowledge about renewable energy technologies?*



Q6. *Do you currently have any mandatory climate reporting requirements?*



Q7. *What support would help you meet reporting requirements?*

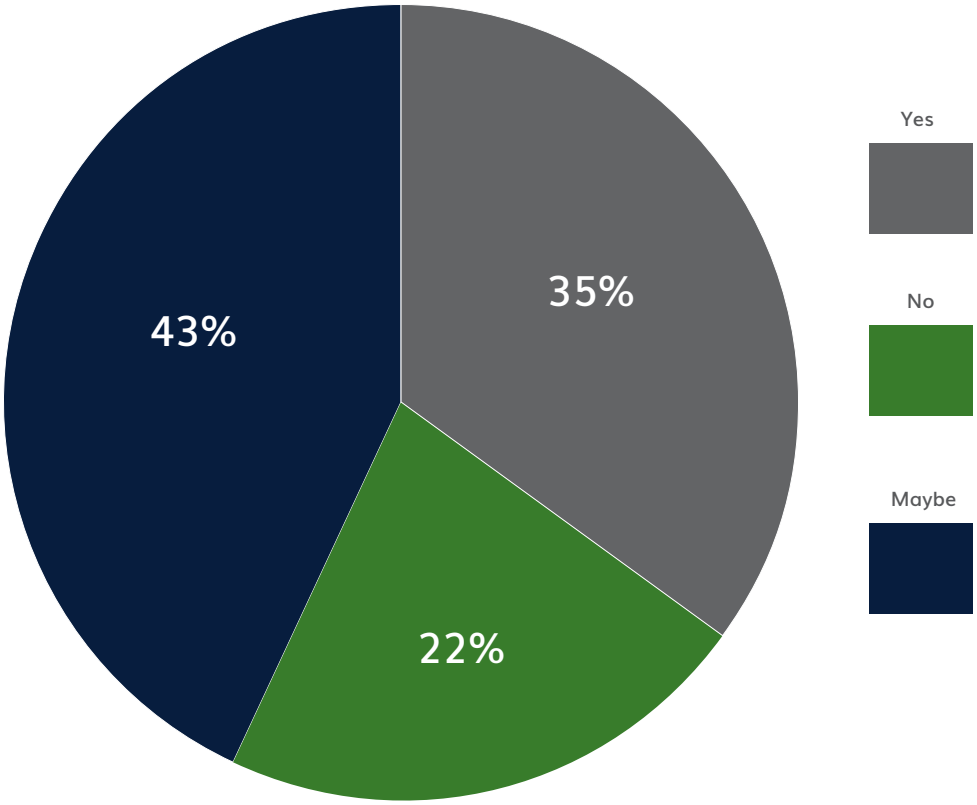
"The requirements are not yet clear, but certainly cost relief. Reporting of any kind takes time, especially if as usual there will be multiple requests in different formats."

"An easy-to-follow guide and requirements on 'how to' implement reporting for 'mandatory climate reporting'. Business Chamber QLD have information and support for this. A similar resource could be emulated. "

"How-to guide - where to get the info, how to compile, advice on good record keeping to make the process easier ongoing."

"Our company has a large footprint; we can liaise with others in the same business all over Australia."

Q8. *Would you consider joining a collaborative private energy grid for consistent, reliable, affordable energy?*



"I would need a detailed understanding of how it works and impacts my business prior to being involved."

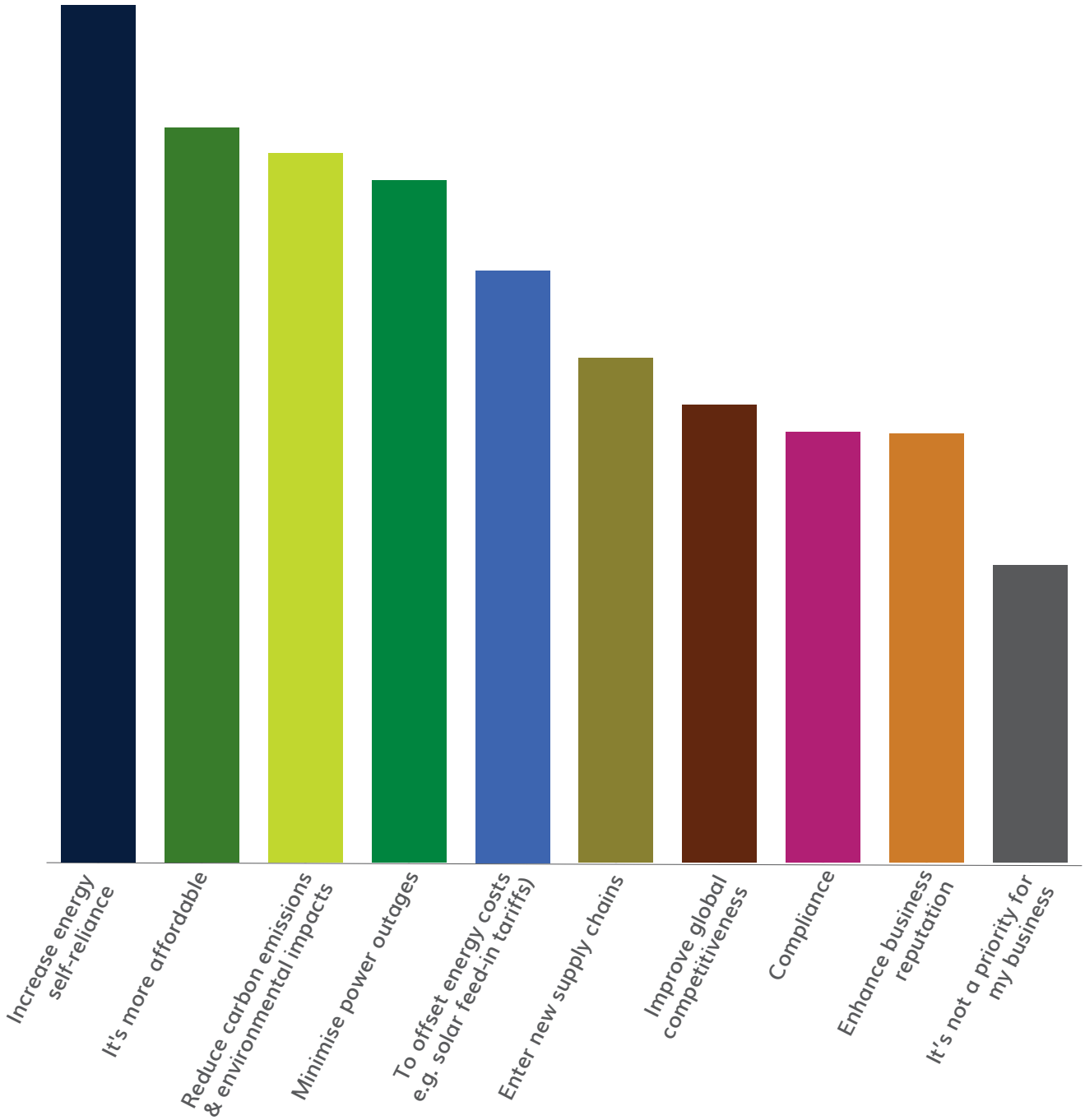
"The community has a lot of waste that could be used for energy generation like they do in Singapore and other countries. Why couldn't each region (or local government) investigate this? It would solve a waste and energy generation problem in one hit -the Australian government would need to provide funding for this."

"There are financial b*enefits from spreading the capital requirements to establish a private energy grid."*

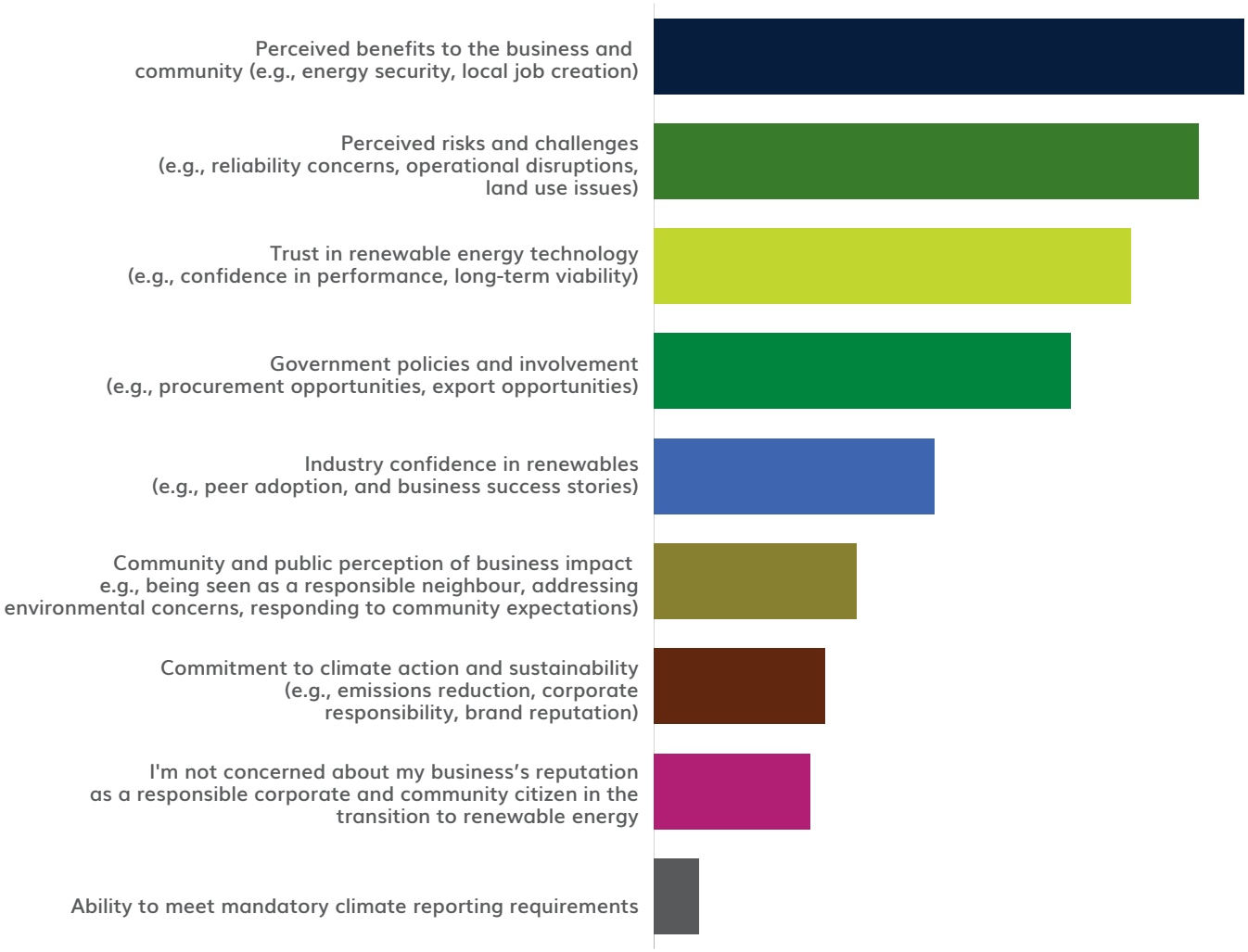
"We would certainly be interested in exploring further and understanding how hospitals / health services in other areas may have participated in something similar, and managed risks and benefits as custodians of critical infrastructure."

"My business already relies on a stand-alone solar and battery off-grid power supply. However, if this opportunity were available (under other circumstances), I would be very interested in this option."

Q9. *What are your top renewable energy priorities? Please rank them in order of preference.*



Q9. *What factors most influence your business's reputation as a responsible corporate and community citizen in the transition to renewable energy? Please rank them in order of preference.*



Q10. *What are the biggest concerns or challenges around renewable energy in your business or region?*

'The cost is too high. I have a solar system installed on the property, but I lease the commercial premises and am not able to add to this infrastructure without cost or permission from the owner which is a barrier.'

'Cost and scale. We're a large government agency with high energy costs. So, although there's good incentive to reduce emissions and increase renewables, upfront investment is high and funding priority is focused on core business. To date, we've proceeded with rooftop solar mostly when external funding / incentives have been available, rather than self-funding them.'

'Balance between opportunity and impact...Ensuring renewable energy projects benefit local communities while protecting agricultural land. Also, a need for better communication and community engagement. And a need for more transparency to build trust and understanding around the clean energy transition.'

'Cost needs to be competitive, Reliable and consistent. If a company dives into / commits to renewables, it is difficult to reverse from the project operation if it is not effective and efficient.'

'Finding the money to implement.'

'Knowledge and awareness of impacts around renewable energy'

'The lack of acknowledgment of the renewables that are occurring in the North Burnett Region. The North Burnett is tacked onto a REZ but where is their voice. The North Burnett has 5 wind farms (1 approved, 1 working through conditions but is considered to be in the Centre REZ zone as 50 % is in another LG area, others in early stages through the state), 2 solar farms (1 at EPBC stage, 1 EPBC approved), 1 battery storage (installed at Mundubbera) and one private pumped hydro (Mt Rawdon – potential of incorporating wind).'

'Lays waste to arable land, flora & fauna and native habitats. Reduces farmland and natural bushland. Non-recyclable parts. Very ugly! Trees which produce oxygen are removed to be replaced by ugly solar & wind farms. Not reliable & too expensive. Go back to coal, gas & oil!'

'The destruction of agricultural land, the increased fire risk and potential for hazardous materials contamination into a clean environment. Using rural zoned land for industrial development. City dwellers would object if their residential suburb was turned into a industrial energy plant. During construction phase, the impact to our rural environment, and road infrastructure by hundreds of daily heavy vehicle movements on poorly built rural roads. The undeniable future risk to the environment when the renewable equipment (solar panels, wind turbines, toxic lithium batteries) must be removed due to damage, obsolescence or end of life. Given that many of these projects are Foreign owned, there is NOTHING to compel them to pay for the clean-up and remediation. The power generated by these renewable plants will be channelled to the cities and the rural locations will not benefit from them'

'Loss of natural bushland & farming land to install renewable power generation that doesn't even meet demand. We cannot undo the loss of nature. Major concerns around end-of-life non-recycling of components. Loss of power occurs the further it is transported, so we should be generating the power closer to where it is needed (the metro regions) on building roofs, on car parks, on bike lanes in the middle of freeways etc.'

'Meeting base load. Unscrupulous developers of renewable projects making money with no regard for community and individual quality of life which has resulted in distrust of such projects. Limited understanding of the scope of options that are possible and how this may be beneficial to my business.'

'Renewable development encroaching on agricultural land along with the distribution network. The inability of solar and wind to provide baseline power.'

'One of the key challenges is that renewable energy is not yet widely supported or positively perceived by local council, some landowners, and members of the community. Misinformation and a lack of understanding about climate science and the benefits of reducing fossil fuel use highlight the need for ongoing, respectful community education and engagement.'

'We require reliable 24/7 power supply to enable heavy manufacturing at our facilities and that of our supply chains. We are not sure that renewables offer this at present.

Reliability and cost. Lack of understanding around options available and uncertainty of how to find out. Potential misinformation that may be around.'

'Affordability and reliability of supply. Renewable energy projects should be rolled out in stages, so that reliability of supply isn't affected. The huge jumps in electricity prices are hurting families and businesses and there is no appreciable benefit to the environment.'

'Affordability, reliability, social and environmental impacts, longevity, regional economic and social benefit and not just impact.'

'Not transitioning fast enough Infrastructure & equipment readiness (EV charging network, electric farming vehicles) Cost of ESG reporting Mandated neutrality would be a disaster for a farming business'

Q11. *What are the business impacts driving your decision making around renewable energy?*