International Roundtable on
Achieving Positive Social and Economic Outcomes
in the Energy Transition

The Next Economy and Melbourne Climate Futures

17 February 2022

Summary of Discussion

This document is a summary of the discussions held at the *International Roundtable on Achieving Positive Social and Economic Outcomes in the Energy Transition*.

Contents

Background

Co-hosted by The Next Economy and Melbourne Climate Futures at the University of Melbourne, the *International Roundtable on Achieving Positive Social and Economic Outcomes in the Energy Transition* bought together over 40 leading thinkers and practitioners in Australia, Germany and Poland[1] who are deeply engaged in the question of how we manage change in the energy sector well. Participants included academics, policy thinkers, civil society groups and unionists across the three countries (for the participant list, see **Appendix A**).

Funded through a grant from the European Union, a central goal of the Roundtable was to strengthen relationships between Australia and Europe in relation to climate change and the energy transition. Germany and Poland were selected as the two European countries to participate in the Roundtable given their domestic coal production and dependence relative to other European countries.

While there are many opportunities to listen to presentations nationally and internationally through conferences and other forums, there are fewer spaces that allow time for deeper conversation among experts working on different aspects of the energy transition. The Roundtable sought to provide space for:

- Detailed discussion of the social, political and economic aspects of managing change in the energy sector (rather than the technological or financial aspects)

- Meaningful dialogue through small group discussions

- Collaboration between researchers and practitioners

- A focus on solutions – sharing 'what's worked' in different contexts.

Prior to the event, all participants were provided with background briefings that provided context to the energy transition in each of the three countries. These can be viewed here.

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[1] Including two participants based in the United Kingdom working closely on transition issues in the focus countries.

Summary of challenges

The Roundtable opened with a summary by Dr. Amanda Cahill, CEO of The Next Economy, of the major challenges to an equitable and sustainable transition across the three countries. This summary was based on responses gathered from Roundtable participants prior to the event. There were a number of common challenges across all countries:

- The importance of planning that is participatory and inclusive.
- The continued political influence of the fossil fuel industry.
- The need to de-politicise discussions about energy futures, and cut through the rise of populism and identity politics.
- The impact of past negative experiences of industrial changes on workers' and regions' fears and expectations for the future.
- Existing poverty and inequality in coal regions.
- The impact of rising energy prices on both attitudes towards and economic consequences of transition.
- The challenges of holding companies to account in relation to remediation and other environmental and social responsibilities.
- Growing concerns and tensions regarding renewable energy expansion, including conflicting land-use issues (for example in relation to agriculture, housing), environmental concerns, opposition to specific renewable energy development projects (especially wind farms), and lack of good regulation and conditions for workers in the renewable energy industry.

In Australian and Poland, a primary concern was the lack of national, long-term commitments to climate and energy policies, plans and targets. The need for more detailed, targeted and well-resourced support for workers affected by mine and plant closures was a priority in Australia and Poland, while in Germany participants noted the importance of planning to maintain workforce capacity. Across the three countries there were tensions between government attitudes of 'leaving it to the market/private sector/technology' (particularly characteristic of the Australian government attitudes) and the challenges of inefficient public administration (a concern in Germany).

Australian participants emphasised the need for more open and honest conversation about the imperative to manage the phase out of fossil fuels and the opportunities in managing it well. The perpetuation of extractive and colonial practices by both fossil fuel and renewable energy industries and the impact of this on the rights of First Nations people was also a particular concern for Australian participants.

You can view Amanda's presentation attached (see slides 4-6 for summary of challenges).

Key themes from small-group discussions

Participants then broke into two rounds of small-group discussion. The first round grouped participants working in similar contexts (for example unionists, community organisers, academics) across different countries to explore what factors have contributed positive social and economic outcomes in the energy transition, including in relation to outcomes for the current and future coal workforce, outcomes for coal-dependent regions, the health of land of waters, and sharing the benefits of the transition for greater wellbeing and justice.

This was followed by a second round of discussion in new groups, this time mixing participants working in different countries and contexts, to reflect on the common themes, similarities and differences that emerged in the previous discussions. The key themes across the two rounds of discussion among the eleven groups are summarised here.

1. Government leadership and substantial public investment in transition

- One of the most significant differences between the German experience and that of Australia and Poland is both the capacity and willingness of the national government to lead and provide significant public investment towards transition. There were reflections on the extent to which changes in the 'political winds' in all countries have made it easier or harder to take action on transition, and even to have a public conversation about it.

- A consistently strong theme that emerged from Australian participants in both the pre-event survey responses and in the discussion groups was the need for both national and regional transition authorities to coordinate and resource place-based transition planning.

- In the absence of national leadership, in both Australia and Poland, local/regional governments are playing an increasingly important role in driving change through both advocacy and economic planning for their regions.

- In the absence of government investment, participants discussed alternative sources of funding for transition work, including philanthropy, memberships and international organisations. It was also proposed that the current coal price boom puts coal companies in a better position to fund transition; if supply-side pressures (lack of finance, insurance, government approvals) continue to keep prices high, it may be possible to lobby for a levy on exports to fund transition.

- On the issue of public investment, it was also noted that Germany's Coal Commission may not have been able to achieve the same outcomes had the deliberations taken place now – the economic impacts of COVID would potentially lower the level of government's

financial support available as well as public acceptance of spending, and heightened concerns about energy security in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine may decrease appetite to reduce domestic coal production.

- Discussions highlighted the flaws in the 'leave it to the market' approach of the Australian government: there is a policy vacuum at the national level particularly in relation to addressing issues of equity in transition, and it continues to ignore calls from business and industry themselves who are increasingly willing to play a role in driving transition but are looking to government for credible policies and policy certainty.

- The scale of public money provided to the fossil fuel industry (via subsidies, tax breaks and other 'helping hands') was also discussed in the context of the potential for this money to be directed to transition funding at no additional cost to government or the taxpayer. It was noted that to an extent, that the German coal industry not being very competitive made it easier for the German government to redirect money to new areas.

- In Australia, the need for Federal legislation and policies on climate change was identified.

2. Diverse coalitions

- Particularly in Australia and Poland, in the absence of national government leadership for climate action and the energy transition, collaboration at the grassroots has been important to success, where it has occurred. A central theme across all discussion groups was the power of diverse coalitions to drive change.

- Faced with both the imperative and inevitability of transition, participants reflected on the 'desire for mature conversation' among groups in coal dependent regions who historically have not worked together (and often opposed each other). The positive impacts of these grassroots coalitions include:

  o Breaking down the partisanship that continues to smother productive dialogue and debate about transition (particularly in Australia)

  o Enabling multi-faceted approach to both problem-solving and problem definition

  o Centring concerns of justice, and the need for coalitions to genuinely and respectfully involve groups who are often marginalised, in particular, in the Australian context, First Nations people

  o More compelling advocacy through the identification and pursuit of shared goals.

- These discussions were linked to broader discussions on the importance of fostering inclusive social dialogue, participation in planning and decision-making and building power at the grassroots (discussed further below), and pushing against fear-based

narratives, partisanship, anti-democratic sentiments that can be evident in the environment movement ('leaving it to the experts'), and a rising tide of right-wing populism in all countries.

Examples of Effective Alliances:

The Hunter Jobs Alliance (New South Wales, Australia)

The Hunter Jobs Alliance was formed in 2020. It involves nine unions and four community environment groups based in the historically coal-dependent Hunter Valley region, which came together with the aim of identifying their shared interests in the future of their region, and to work with government and industry towards that future. The groups involved sought to generate a more constructive conversation about the future of the Hunter Valley, one that supports ongoing jobs, economic opportunity, a healthy environment and strong community.

The Alliance campaigns for "local and sustainable jobs in energy, manufacturing and supply-chains, food-production, education and health and care, with union agreements and the best possible terms and conditions [and] for all new energy sources to be renewable energy with low carbon firming." (See the **Hunter Jobs Alliance Declaration**)

In a region grappling with large and complex challenges bound up in state, national and global forces of economics and trade, the group is articulating a clear vision from the community to decision-makers about what they want for their region.

Read more at the **Hunter Jobs Alliance website** and listen to **this interview** between The Next Economy CEO Dr. Amanda Cahill and Hunter Jobs Alliance Coordinator, Warrick Jordan. Contact **Warrick** to find out more about the Alliance.

Liverpool Plains Alliance, (New South Wales, Australia)

An 'unlikely' alliance of farmers, the Indigenous traditional owners (Gomeroi people) and environmentalists was successful in preventing the development of a new coal mine proposed by Chinese state-owned company Shenhua (the world's largest coal producer) and BHP in the Liverpool Plains. See **here** for more background.

The Gladstone Alliance, (Queensland, Australia)

Gladstone is a regional industrial port town in Central Queensland. The region was a focal point in the 2018 Australian Federal election, with the marginal seat of Flynn swinging strongly to the conservative Coalition party and the far-right One Nation party and Palmer United Party.

The Gladstone Alliance involves nine organisations working together to articulate a shared vision for the region's future that isn't dependant on coal and gas mining, industry and export. In the context of creating change in Gladstone, discussions emphasise the importance of respectful and inclusive 'listening campaigns' with local workers and communities to understand and address concerns about employment and services, and the value in collaborating with researchers to build evidence for a fossil fuel-free economic future.

Polish Smog Alert (Poland)

Polish Smog Alert is a grassroots social movement initiated by citizens in Kraków concerned about the poor air quality in Poland (the dirtiest in the EU). Through awareness raising and strong social pressure on government, the group achieved the introduction of a ban on solid fuel heating in Kraków, the first in the country.

The movement has grown, with the establishment of local Smog Alert groups across the country (there are now 40 local branches). As a result of the work of Polish Smog Alert groups, public awareness of the smog problem has increased, the air pollution problem is no longer denied or ignored by the public or government (as it had been only a few years earlier), and the issue of air pollution receives wide coverage in local and national media. Smog Alert activists work with local officials, doctors, the academic community and the church, and describe their approach as seeking wide and inclusive dialogue aimed at solving the problem of poor air quality in Poland.

Anti-smog resolutions have now been passed by the authorities of 11 out of 16 regions in Poland, the national government has introduced emissions standards for low power, solid fuel boilers (stopping the sales of the most polluting coal boilers) and introduced quality standards for coal, limiting the sales of coal waste, and in 2018, a number of financial measures to support air quality improvement were launched, including a 25 billion Euro subsidy and soft-loan programme supporting boiler replacement and thermal renovation of single family houses and a tax relief for these investments. See the **Polish Smog Alert website** for more details and to get in touch with the group's leader, Andrzej Guła.

Coalitions in Silesia (South-West Poland)

In Silesia there has been some success in prevention the opening of new open-pit coal mines. This success has been the result of careful, long-term coalition building between local communities, workers, and researchers and scientists. Participants in Poland emphasised the role of scientists, providing evidence of economic, environmental and health impacts to support the case for mine closure.

3. Inclusive, participatory public discourse, planning and decision-making

- Facilitating and resourcing inclusive and participatory processes was identified as key to building social support for transition, and ensuring planning and decision-making is fair and effective.

- At a national level, Germany's Coal Commission was highlighted as a positive example of a multi-stakeholder process that was able to depoliticise the discussion around the coal exit to a considerable extent, achieving an outcome with political authority and broad public acceptance.

- The discussions acknowledged the Commission's imperfections such as the insufficiently ambitious deadline of 2038 brought forward to 2030 by the new German government, the 'last minute deals', and huge price tag that included significant funding to coal companies. Regardless, the Commission is regarded as playing an important role in shifting the national conversation in Germany: with agreement on an exit date, the discussion has moved past whether transition will happen, to how to ensure it is done well, within the necessary timeframe.

- There was some discussion by German participants expressing surprise that there wasn't more public push-back in relation to the exit date being brought forward by the new government – this was attributed to it being such a public, national process ('people don't see the need to open up debate again'), and the generous financial and other support to workers and regions that has been committed to (thus generating trust in the process and that they will be supported). A question was raised as to whether the Commission would have been able to achieve the same outcomes in the current climate of reduced fiscal capacity due to the economic impacts of COVID and increasing concerns about energy security.

- The experience of Germany was contrasted with Poland – with the decision of a coal exit date of 2049 in Poland described as being an example of what happens when dialogue takes place in silos, rather than across the community, unions, business and government. For an analysis of lessons from Germany's Coal Commission for Australia and other coal-producing countries, see **this article** by roundtable participant **Tony Shields**, Research Fellow at The Australia Institute.

- Discussions focussed on both procedural and distributive justice through participation: people need to feel they have been properly involved, and the right people need to be involved to promote outcomes that are fair. In Poland in particular, there was a sense that ordinary people feel left out/left behind in the distribution of benefits.

- In Australia, there were a number of examples of participatory approaches to planning and decision-making at a regional level, including in the Latrobe Valley in the south-eastern state of Victoria, and Collie in Western Australia (see more detail on Collie in section 4).

Latrobe Valley Authority (Victoria, South-Eastern Australia)

Following the announcement of the closure of Hazelwood Power Station in March 2017, the Victorian State Government established the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) to support the region through sustainable economic transition. Drawing on best practice place-based approaches to regional development, the LVA was given a clear mandate to bring community, business and government together to respond to the immediate shock of the Hazelwood closure, but also to facilitate economic diversification and long-term sustainable prosperity for the region. See more on the **LVA website**.

Key success factors included strong advocacy by local communities and workers, significant investment by the Victorian State Government, and the role of the LVA in engaging local communities and workers, providing immediate support to workers who lost their jobs and exploring a wide range of options for regional economic diversification and renewal.

- Examples were also discussed of the varying success of community-engagement efforts in relation to renewable energy project developments. Lessons for community engagement based on a detailed study of wind energy conflict in King Island, Tasmania, in southern Australia, are explored in articles co-authored by Roundtable participant Dr. Rebecca Colvin, Australian National University (see references in footnote[2]; for the PDFs of the articles, contact **Rebecca**). Other successful examples of community-involvement in renewable energy project development that were discussed included Australia's **first community-owned wind farm** in Hepburn Shire in Victoria and the Community Consultative Committee (CCC) established as part of the **Sapphire Wind Farm** development in the New England region of northern New South Wales.

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[2] Colvin, R.M., Witt, G. Bradd and J. Lacey (2016) 'How wind became a four-letter word: Lessons for community engagement from a wind energy conflict in King Island, Australia' *Energy Policy*, 98, p.483-494 and Colvin, R.M., Witt, G. Bradd, Lacey, J. and K. Witt (2019) 'The community cost of consultation: Characterising the qualitative social impacts of wind energy development that failed to proceed in Tasmania, Australia' *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 77, p.40-48

- In Australia, the involvement of First Nations communities in discussions and decision-making in relation to transition was emphasised as critical to moving away from colonial and extractivist practices, and realising the transformative potential of the energy transition, with respect to the promotion of the rights of and opportunities for First Nations people. **Original Power** and the **First Nations Clean Energy Network** are doing important work to enable First Nations people to harness the opportunities from the expansion of renewable energy in Australia. Contact **Karrina Nolan**, Executive Director of Original Power to find out more.

- It was posed that COP26 exemplified the degree to which Indigenous peoples in Australia and elsewhere continue to be excluded from decision-making. There were reflections on how much further there is to go in ensuring the perspectives and priorities of Indigenous peoples are heard and acted on, and that 'success' in climate action and the energy transition to date is questionable from a First Nations perspective.

- Acknowledging the importance of participatory approaches, discussions also considered the equity and effectiveness of participatory processes themselves – *Who has the time and ability to participate? How do you make sure everyone has a seat at the table? How do you ensure it is a safe and respectful process for all involved? What commitments are there to taking action in response to the views shared?* Discussions highlighted that providing space for all people affected by transition decisions to respectfully put their views across and have their views considered, allows more fulsome identification of fears and aspirations, risks and opportunities, contributing to more robust, equitable and accepted solutions.

- Discussions highlighted the broader need to strengthen participatory democracy, particularly in relation to climate and energy policy, and the supporting work needed to build communities' capacity to engage in informed conversation and public debate. In one group this was discussed in the context of strong anti-democratic sentiment amongst the environment movement in Europe, characterised by an elitist 'leave it to the experts' attitude in relation to climate and energy solutions. An example noted in another group was the attitude towards climate targets, with a view that economic players don't understand the need for community to be involved in the discussion.

- Discussions included the challenges of meaningfully involving individual citizens in climate and energy policy discussions and the importance of creating spaces that give power back to citizens by helping them 'bridge the knowledge gap' and have a direct voice to decision-making. Methodologies like citizens assemblies and citizens councils were discussed as ways to ensure people can fully engage with complex issues over time; the importance of *going to* affected communities to listen was also noted.

- When reflecting on the speed of fossil-fuel phase out in Germany relative to Australia and Poland, it was noted that this is partly due to the country's long history of strong political mobilisation to broaden and deepen public discourse about the desirability, inevitability and feasibility of transition away from coal and nuclear energy.

BoMiasto (Poland)

BoMiasto is a civil society group working to grow a civic movement around issues of environmental and social justice in Poland. They do this by providing facilitating public debates, providing training (in 2022 focused on the subject of just transition in Silesia, and understanding of clean energy and community energy more broadly), wider community education through a podcast series and events that invite politicians to hear from community members.

It was noted that Poland has a short history of democracy, so public debate and using voting power to create change is a significant cultural shift, making the achievements of groups like BoMiasto and the broader climate movement even more significant.

Climate and Recovery Initiative (Australia)

The **Climate and Recovery Initiative** brings together leaders from government, business and civil society to identify the best ideas for aligning Australia's economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with a transition towards a net zero emissions economy, and "get them into the right hands." The basis of this approach is to get 'the sensible people' to talk about the way forward (i.e. not politicians). It is coordinated by the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) and ClimateWorks Australia, with a steering group that includes the Australian Industry Group (AiGroup), the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and Pollination. Information from the Initiative's stakeholder roundtables can be found **here**.

See **this report** on the impact of decarbonisation on Australia's local government areas.

Getting state and federal government to come to the party with resourcing for transition plans remains a challenge for self-organising approaches like this.

- Other examples in relation to participatory mechanisms highlighted in discussions included:

  o Codetermination in Germany,[3] which facilitates the participation of workers in companies' decision making. This can contribute to better consideration of workers' interests in the context of transition; contrasting with reflections from Australian participants that, while there is an increasing focus within industry and business on Environment and Social Governance (ESG) responsibilities, the 'social' (with respect to workers) is often left out.

  o Public training in conflict resolution in Germany.

  o Work by the **Investor Group on Climate Change** that has contributed to an increase in the quality of participatory processes driven by companies.

- Questions in relation to participation posed but not resolved in discussions included questions about the role of national governments in funding and support community engagement to help overcome local opposition to transition (what's the most effective way for them to do this?), and questions of power – who gets to create spaces for participation? How do people know who they can trust to work with?

4. Painting a picture of the future

- A number of discussions reflected on success that has happened when we *show* people (communities, government, unions, industry) what the future looks like – not a distant future, but one that shows what's needed and possible 'right here, right now'. This was seen as critical to displace fear-based narratives to which have blocked productive dialogue about communities' futures. Discussants reflected that "to embrace transition, people need to know what it will look like" and, when done well, we can "use research to shift hearts."

- A common theme of in the survey responses, echoed in the discussions was the fear among not only coal workers but their communities, about what the future will hold as a result of transition. This fear exists in all countries, and was attributed to negative past experiences of structural adjustment and transition, as well as the fanning of those fears by vested interests (particularly evident in the rise and rhetoric of right-wing populists in coal-dependent regions in all three countries). It was noted in a number of discussion groups that the 'mega trends' at play in the 1990s have shifted, and for many regions in both Australia and Poland, the conditions are far more favourable to transition. For example, it was noted in one discussion that Upper Silesia is the most urbanised and industrialised region in Poland and facing job shortages in many emerging industries – providing ample economic opportunity for coal workers if transition is well-planned.

- Detailed, future-focused, region-specific research on job and economic development opportunities, such as that completed by Beyond Zero Emissions (see example below), has been successful in shifting the dialogue from fear to opportunity at the local level in a number of Australia regions. This kind of work was also highlighted as important in Poland. It was emphasised that the work needs to address workers' specific concerns about the quality of jobs in new industries (particularly considering the relatively high pay of coal workers).

- Across the groups it was emphasised that research is most effective when it engages with practice (through collaboration with business, communities and especially workers/unions) and is supported by action (e.g. demonstration projects, or ensuring that by design, participatory processes ensure community input is incorporated into policy), being mindful of the tendency for communities to be 'over-consulted'.

Collie at the Crossroads (Western Australia, south-western Australia)

Collie is a town in south-western Australia facing the closure of its coal plants and mines, the first to be announced being coal generators at its Muja Power Station.

Think tank Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) produced a report '*Collie at the Crossroads: Planning a future beyond coal*' detailing the economic opportunities for Collie's coal workers and the wider Collie community in the transition to a low-carbon economy, including in renewable energy transition, sustainable building materials and recycling renewable technology, which the report concluded could more than replace all existing coal industry jobs and bring new industries to Collie and surrounds.

The **Climate Justice Union** (CJU), a grassroots organisation of over 200 members, played a key role in facilitating community engagement to develop the report. The CJU ensured broad representation in the consultations, including with workers and Indigenous community members; cognisant in the process of building trust across groups for buy-in to the vision/directions in the report.

Most of the proposals in the report have now been funded by government.

Beyond the work in Collie, BZE's research has been contributing to breaking down the partisanship that has been a key obstacle to productive dialogue and action on energy transition in Australia. BZE's research has focused on answering specific problems, such as 'how to power more manufacturing with renewable energy?' in the context of specific regions, working with communities to establish local buy-in, and taking a strategic approach to selling these positive stories of opportunity to government – presenting governments something they can say 'yes' to. Read more of BZE's work **here**.

- A related point to these discussions was the importance of open data, which in Poland has enabled detailed analysis by the Instrat Foundation on the country's renewable energy potential (see for example **this report**). For more information about Instrat's work, visit their **website** or contact Roundtable participant, **Aleksander Szpor**.

5. Credible, well-funded plans for workers and regions

- Discussions emphasised the importance of regional economic development, in addition to tailored support for coal workers.

- The discussions highlighted the lessons learned from the failed structural adjustment policies of the past in all countries (which contribute to fears and hesitancies of the current coal workforce about transition, particularly in poorer regions) – just paying out workers isn't an economic solution. The Polish experience was highlighted in particular – in the 1990s, generous redundancy packages were paid, but there was no investment in re-skilling, thus pushing people into poverty when that money ran out.

- Worker support policies need to address the wage differential and the geographic dispersal of jobs in new industries (noted as harder in Australia than in Europe). Taking into account the fears and mistrust of workers, as highlighted in section four above, workers need "convincing evidence and examples of new economic and employment opportunities", that are not just in renewables but other sustainable growth industries. As noted earlier, the bigger challenge in most countries is one of labour shortages, rather than unemployment; the issue is not that there's a shortage of work, but a shortage of good, well-paid work.

- The German Coal Commission has addressed the wage differential (at a significant cost) by providing an adjustment allowance for coal workers, with wages topped up for a maximum of five years until they retire, and 5-7 billion Euro in compensation to fund early retirement for workers aged 58 and above.

- The need for equivalence between renewable jobs compared to the well-unionised fossil fuel intensive sectors has been an issue that many regional economies in Australia are trying grapple with. This requires a much more nuanced and cooperative dialogue than what is happening now; the politicisation and vested interest of governments have stifled these kinds of conversations to date. There is a need and opportunity for industry and other business actors to take these conversations forward in the vacuum of leadership from government.

- Research such as that conducted by BZE in Collie (see above) is providing the kind of credible evidence of the jobs available to fossil fuel industry workers, when workers' support policies are combined with regional economic planning. It was highlighted that

transition policies need to address workers' concern not only for their own futures, but wider concerns for the wellbeing of their children and community.

- The work to diversify the local economies of coal dependent communities was generally considered the harder part of the equation, but critical to provide sustained prosperity and distributed benefits for coal regions – "building economic and job opportunities for the future, not just worrying about current industries". The Latrobe Valley Authority has had this combined focus on immediate response and longer-term planning for economic diversification and renewal, built on local knowledge and local strengths.

- Related to the need for a focus on regional economic diversification were points made by German and Polish participants on the importance of planning pathways for youth. The attitude of the Polish government was described as expecting that demographic trends of an ageing workforce (approaching retirement) will deal with the transition challenge for the current workforce, without planning for young people who continue to enter trade schools geared for jobs in industries that will close very soon. Planning is needed now to reorient the focus of vocational training for Polish youth.

- Regional planning has been important in some parts of Poland, especially in absence of action at national level.

- Many Australian participants emphasised regional transition authorities as key to enabling effective planning for workers and regions, as well as the economic diversification that needs to take place at a national level to enable export replacement (including the development of Australia's renewable export potential).

- The importance of a regional approach was underscored by the fact that in all three countries there is a consistent theme that regional areas that are most impacted by transition are the most resistant to changes; regional approaches to influencing discussions and policies have proven effective in all countries.

6. Community benefit/social contract

- This encompasses both the substance of transition policy and the framing of public discourse, influenced by countries' political cultures and histories.

- In Germany, concern for distributive justice is far more evident in transition policy and discourse than in Australia, where neoliberalism is the dominant policy paradigm.

- In Germany, the concept underpinning worker support is that no-one should be worse-off through transition. In contrast, in Australia it is presented as a zero-sum game, with the dominant narrative perpetuating a sense of 'winners and losers', locking in a debate

between letting change happen or defending the status quo. There appears to be a similar zero-sum attitude in Poland.

- In terms of policy design, the feed-in tariffs in Germany's first Renewable Energy Act (EEG) in 2000 supported the proliferation of community-owned energy; the most recent updates to the Act (2021) guarantees community benefit for communities that allow wind parks to be built through a share in the park's income up to 0.2 cents per kWh for 20 years (the amount can be reduced if the operator offers discounted power supply contracts to people living nearby). This goes some way to address the growing opposition to wind energy in Germany.

- At the same time, it was acknowledged that the burden is still far from fairly weighted in favour of the community versus industry (e.g. tax breaks on cars and combustion engine outweighing the carbon price).

- The **Sapphire Wind Farm** was highlighted as an example of a benefit-sharing approach that has generated social licence for a renewable energy project tin Australia.

- With the federal government largely absent from the transition policy space in Australia, the extent of community benefit reaped through renewable energy projects in Australia largely comes down to community advocacy and individual companies' relative commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility.

- A common theme among Australian participants was concern that Australia is experiencing a largely 'privatised/business-led transition', with a land-hungry (and increasingly export-focused) approach to renewable energy development dominating; "when energy is not locally shared or there are no lasting benefits for the community and it is all exported the energy transition is not a fair and equitable."

- The absence of government policy leadership is a risk to communities (particularly those already marginalised) and the environment, and it places more demands on groups working at the grassroots like Original Power, the First Nations Clean Energy Network, the Hunter Jobs Alliance and The Next Economy to show how the transition can happen in a way that is fast and fair.

- A positive outcome highlighted in Poland was the financial support for retrofits to get rid of coal and wood heating in homes (regulations adopted by 14 out of 16 regions); discussants noted that even with a right-wing government, the package will support transition for the lowest income households.

- The overarching theme was the importance of the social contract: a commitment to inclusiveness and the welfare of affected communities, with workers and locals sharing in benefits.

7. Role of unions

- Discussions highlighted the tensions for the trade union movement – "How do you defend the workers but also defend our children's futures?" There were reflections on the importance of unions on 'holding the line' in ensuring workers are looked after as things change, but this can slow down the pace of climate action, especially when they have to bring all the members along and their livelihoods are directly tied to the coal industry.

- Where unions have played a pro-active and constructive role in transition planning, positive outcomes have been achieved. For example, in the Latrobe Valley, the unions negotiated with government and industry to ensure a redeployment scheme. This wasn't as successful as was hoped as industry controlled the employment process, however they still managed to find jobs in other plants for around 90 workers from the Hazelwood Power Plant.

- It was noted that the increasing divisiveness of Australian climate politics over the decades has stifled positive union engagement in public debate (for example, in the 2000s, the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Unions (CFMEU) was communicating regularly with members about climate change and emissions reduction, however this quietened as different parts of the union felt pressure not to discuss the science). Many unions are once again starting to play a positive role in discussion about transition.

- It was also noted that the disruptions caused by the energy transition offered an opportunity to fight for a range of worker rights by engaging in broader alliances to back-in union campaigns and priorities.

8. Effective messaging

In terms of effective messaging, reflections shared included:

- the effectiveness of public health messaging focused on air pollution used by the campaign by **Polish Smog Alert** that resulted in a ban on coal and wood heating first in Kraków (followed by a number of other cities) and a number of other positive actions by

the Polish government in relation to emissions standards and air quality (see more in section 2 and visit the website for more details and to get in touch with the group's leader, Andrzej Guła (Roundtable participant)).

- In discussions on the effectiveness of public health messaging in Poland, there was reference to workshops in 2019 on climate denialism in fossil fuel regions, which found an evolution to a discourse of 'techno-fantasies'. 'Clean coal' and nuclear power are touted by government and have support as reasons for not needing to take action. In this context, the issue of air-quality has been a tangible issue that people can rally around and use to influence local and national policy. These more practical issues such as environmental health concerns have proven productive to generate policy change.

- There are similar instances of how these issues have been used by grassroots groups in Australia. For example, the work of the Hunter Community Environment Centre and its work with communities around the Vales Point and Eraring power stations in the Lower Hunter region.

- Health messaging in relation to extreme heat and climate change has also had some (more limited) success in Australia.

- Messages around the potential of 'energy autonomy' and 'energy sovereignty' is increasingly resonating across all countries.

- Messaging is more effective when it is grounded in an understanding of the full scope of community sentiment (which requires listening).

- We cannot focus solely on the future and we cannot ignore people's fears. Past lived experience and histories of transition (e.g. suffering in East Germany and Poland in the 1990s) colour people's attitudes towards the current transition and trust in change processes. These understandable fears need to be brought out into the open to have constructive, trusting discussions.

- Using accessible/relatable language when talking about transition is important; in the Australian vernacular, your explanation "has to pass the 'pub test'". It was expressed that transition has become an academic discussion, in some communities viewed as a 'ruse' or 'plot', rather than a practical challenge/opportunity that communities need to face together. This is linked to communities' past negative experiences of structural adjustment and mistrust of climate politics.

- Diverse and compelling spokespeople are needed. One example offered was of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), which has provided a platform for people in low-income households to be media spokespeople on issues of climate action and just

transition. Another was the Australian *Better Futures Forum* in the lead up to COP26, which brought together people from all walks of life in a non-partisan forum.

- From a political perspective, greater support can be generated for transition by spending money on things that are visible to the electorate, like electric buses.

- Showing communities, particularly rural communities, how they can be part of the energy solution is powerful (linked to policy design that ensures community benefit).

- Moments of crisis can mobilise people with the visibility of the climate reality (air pollution events, natural disasters, extinction threats).

9. Very targeted advocacy

Examples shared during the Roundtable included:

- Targeting business in relation to climate change risk. Since 2015, the Centre for Policy Development in Australia has commissioned senior figures in the legal sector and government to articulate the risks posed by climate to businesses and those who lead them. Legal opinion by a senior barrister was used to engage associations such as chambers of commerce, boards and regulators. This has succeeded in getting the issues of climate change risk on the agenda in boardrooms around Australia. This demonstrates how "pulling a single lever" by using systemic approach helps to change the way an entire sector operates.

- A coalition of peak bodies, worker advocacy groups and other actors coordinated how they used the "cost of borrowing" and the "cost of capital" as basis for the most effective argument to influence the Australian government's decision about whether to adopt a policy for net zero emissions in the lead up to the COP26 in Glasgow. The consistency of this message was able to influence the government's understanding of how Australia could engage in global capital markets. After about a month, the Australian Treasurer cited this argument as the decisive threat that forced the government to adopt a target of net zero emissions by 2050. A lesson from this experience is that "politics is a team sport" and getting everyone behind an argument that can be adopted by those in positions of power can create change.

10. Persistence

A final thread running through the discussions was the reminder for persistence, with participants reflecting on many achievements, despite what can often feel like slow and uneven progress. This included reflections on:

- Carbon Pricing – once see as academic, is now an effective policy in Europe under the Emissions Trading Scheme.

- 'Just Transition' – once seen as a labour slogan is now widely accepted discourse and policy in Europe. While this is not the case to the same degree in Australia, there is still far broader acceptance (at least in talk, if not in action) of the concept and principles (for example, it is now incorporated in the National Farmers Federation's policy platform).

- Communities' understanding of the imperative and inevitability of transition, even if the politics (in Australia and Poland) continues to stymie productive discussion about how to do it and how to do it well.

- The attention, social activism, political pressure and commitment that has increased with each successive COP and was key in ensuring the success of the Germany's Coal Commission and in achieving a bi-partisan commitment to net zero in 2050 in Australia and elsewhere in the lead-up to COP26 last year.

11. Key elements of the German experience

The discussion highlighted a number of elements of the German experience that have contributed to the country's relative success in the energy transition, contrasting with Australia and Poland. These included:

- A strong history of social movements. Germany has had decades of movements building support and pressure for a just transition, starting in the 1970s with the anti-nuclear movement and early support for renewable energy with the Renewable Energy Act in 2000, that saw a surge in collectively-owned renewable energy projects. Strong social movements over the last decade in Germany are seen as key to ensuring the success of the Coal Commission and government follow-through.

- Broad acceptance of the reality of climate change among the German population. Discussions about what is working to build climate awareness and public support for transition highlighted the role of organised movements (including Fridays for Future which has played a significant role in shifting the conversation in Germany in particular, and movements like BoMiasto in Poland, which are generating greater climate awareness). Discussions also highlighted the importance of effective messaging and finding a unifying cause – for example, key to the success of Polish Smog Alert.

- Its corporatist, consensus-based political system has been conducive to inclusive energy policy and transition planning.

- History of social dialogue and social partnership has meant that Germany is generally better at managing structural change. Some participants suggested that historically, the

English-speaking world has not managed structural change well; Australian participants noted the German experience as being in stark contrast to that of Australian workers 'cast aside' when industries close.

- Culture of regional cooperation and corporate responsibility that has supported the take-up of coal workers by other major industries in coal-dependent regions.

- Capacity (and relative public support) for large public expenditure on transition.

- The importance of social safety nets in broader society – where a strong safety net is in place like Germany, people feel less threatened by change (even if change is still difficult).

12.   Other factors contributing to positive change

- Bi-partisan (or cross-party) commitment to net-zero. The cross-party support for the *Energiewende* has been a key success factor for Germany. In Australia, the Federal Government's commitment to net zero by 2050 made prior to COP26 last year has opened some space for more productive discussions. While the Polish Government has now committed to exiting coal by 2049, it is questionable how much this has progressed national discussions.

- Take the politics out of climate and energy policy. This was cited as being achieved to some degree through Germany's multi-stakeholder process of the Coal Commission, as well as through the United Kingdom's (UK) Climate Change Council and the EU Green Deal – i.e. placing responsibility for climate policy within structures that are difficult for politicians to influence. In the case of the UK, the Climate Change Council has taken some decisions in relation to climate policy out of the political domain, with the statutory authority having separate legislated powers; in the EU, one or two countries disagreeing with the direction of the Green Deal does not derail the whole process. In determining the long-term success of transition outcomes, it was emphasised that any social benefits negotiated for workers and regions should be legislated and protected from change by successive governments.

- The reality of mine and plant closures have forced action (e.g. Latrobe Valley Authority)

- Economic factors (influenced by policy settings) are accelerating transition, for example:

  o The carbon price in Europe has changed behaviour and investment decision (coupled with the real and relative decline in cost of renewables)

  o Investor pressure (particularly by superannuation/pension funds)

- Technological advances that have improved the cost-competitiveness of low-emissions technologies that are accelerating the take-up of electric vehicles and solar by individuals/households

- Decisions by trading partners encouraging change. For example, net zero commitments by Australia's major export partners (Japan, South Korea, China and India) have stimulated more national discussion about the need to decarbonise commodity exports, and moves by the EU to introduce a carbon border levy ('Carbon Club') are changing the value of carbon-intensive exports.

- Robust legislation around mining: In Australia there are some examples of how companies can do mining rehabilitation better. For example, the Ranger Uranium mine in the Northern Territory is spending approximately 1 billion AUD. There is however generally a lack of mine rehabilitation and legacy issues at the state legislatures, partly because the states receive much needed billions of dollars in royalties from the industry.

For the full list of roundtable participants and contact details, see **Appendix A**

Appendix A. Roundtable Participants

Australia

Name	Position and affiliation	
Amanda Cahill (Lead facilitator)	Chief Executive Officer	The Next Economy
Angela Heck (Facilitator)	Energy Program Director	The Next Economy
Byron Cubit	Community Organiser	Queensland Community Alliance
Chris Briggs	Research Director, Institute for Sustainable Futures	University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
Colin Long (Facilitator)	Just Transitions Organiser	Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC)
Damian Commane	Head of Suunto - Australia and New Zealand	Suunto
Georgia Windrum	Senior Policy Officer - Climate, Energy and Just Transition	Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)
Heidi Lee	Chief Executive Officer	Beyond Zero Emissions
Jacqueline Peel	Director	Melbourne Climate Futures, University of Melbourne
Jaden Harris	Digital Marketing	United Workers Union

Jai Allison (Facilitator)	Engagement Director	The Next Economy
John Wiseman (Facilitator)	Senior Research Fellow	Melbourne Climate Futures, University of Melbourne
Julie Lyford (Facilitator)	Community Consultant	The Next Economy (Consultant)
Karen Cain	Former CEO, Latrobe Valley Authority	
Karrina Nolan	Executive Director	Original Power
Kate Donnelly	Corporate Engagement Analyst	Investor Group on Climate Change (IGCC)
Kellie Caught	Program Director, Climate and Energy	Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Laura Melville (Facilitator)	Community Organiser	Environment Victoria
Linda Connor	Emeritus Professor of Anthropology	University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
Lisa Lumsden (Facilitator)	Project Officer	The Next Economy / University of Sydney (UTS)
Luke Skinner	Secretary	Climate Justice Union WA
Matt Bakker (Facilitator)	Food and Land Use Program Director	The Next Economy
Nicola Flook (Facilitator)	Project Officer	The Next Economy (Consultant)

Peter Colley	National Research Director	Mining and Energy Union (MEU)
Pastor Ray Minniecon	Executive Member	Indigenous Peoples Organisation (IPO)
Rebecca (Bec) Colvin	Senior Lecturer	Australian National University
Sandi Middleton (Facilitator)	Project Officer	The Next Economy (Consultant)
Toby Phillips	Program Director, Sustainable Economy	Centre for Policy Development (CPD)
Tony Maher	General President	Mining and Energy Union (MEU)
Tony Shields	Research Fellow	The Australia Institute
Warrick Jordan	Coordinator	Hunter Jobs Alliance
Wendy Farmer (Facilitator)	President	Voices of the Valley

Germany

Name	Position and affiliation	
Annekatrin Niebuhr	Senior Researcher, Empirical Labour Economics and Spatial Econometrics	Institute for Employment Research, Kiel University
Franziska Holz	Deputy Head of Department	German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)
Hanno Focken	Senior Consultant, Strategic Foresight, Energy, Participation	ifok
Jan-Hendrik Kamlage		Center for Environmental Management, Resources and Energy (CURE), Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Katja Müller	Visiting Professor/Privatdozentin	IASS Potsdam Institute/Martin Luther Uni Halle
Michael Jakob	Senior Fellow, Ecological Institute	MCC Berlin
Nga Ngo Thuy	Project Officer	Agora Energiewende
Tobias Haas	Research Associate	IASS Potsdam Institute

Poland

Name	Position and affiliation	
Aleksander Szpor	Head of Just Transition Research Program	Instrat Foundation
Andrzej Guła	Leader	Polish Smog Alert
Grzegorz Trefon	Advisor	Trade Union Alliance (KADRA)
Jakub Sokolowski	Economist	Instytut Badań Strukturalnych (IBS) (Institute for Structural Research)
Patryk Białas	Chief Executive Officer	Stowarzyszenie BoMiasto
Radosław Gawlik	President	Stowarzyszenie Ekologiczne/Ecological Association (EKO-UNIA)

United Kingdom

Name	Position and affiliation	
Gareth Edwards	Associate Professor	University of East Anglia
Tomas Maltby	Reader in International Politics	Kings College London