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# Advancing Energy Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity for First Nations through Green Energy Statecraft

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## Abstract

A new approach to energy transition governance is necessary, one that is inclusive of First Nations on whose land the energy transition will occur. In this short position paper, we elaborate upon the concept of green energy statecraft (GES), a new approach to energy transition governance that, amongst other ambitious goals, partners with First Nations in ways that benefit these communities as well as driving energy transition. We show how Australia might improve its energy transition through adopting GES and creating the conditions for First Nations energy justice. In exhibiting how this occurs, we examine generative examples of First Nations communities benefiting from the approach of GES in the United States, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Indigenous ownership of renewable energy industries is offered as an optimal outcome of GES.

## Keywords

Energy; Indigenous; Renewable; Statecraft; Green; Australia

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## Introduction

In 2022, Australia's Labor government led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese came to power promising a new settlement with the country's First Nations people through the establishment of a Constitutional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament ([Albanese 2022](#)). This promise was a direct response to Australia's First Nations people, expressed in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart ([Uluru Statement 2017](#)). In 2023, however, the constitutional referendum required to establish the Voice was comprehensively defeated, despite overwhelming support amongst Australians for reconciliation and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a greater say in matters that affect them ([Biddle et al. 2023](#)).

Since the referendum's failure, the Albanese Government has refocused its efforts to improve the lives and livelihoods of Australia's First Nations people, placing primary emphasis on 'practical' measures to 'close the gap' in economic and social advantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. 'Closing the Gap' refers to the ambition to reduce the yawning disparities that exist in health, education, economic, and other important life opportunities and outcomes between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. In this regard, the potential economic windfalls associated with the green energy transition constitute a major opportunity. Yet when it comes to harnessing the transformative economic and social potential of the energy transition, Australia is starting well behind other nations. Indeed, Australia's comparative track record is woeful. Only one per cent of Australian renewables developments currently involve First Nations equity, compared with 20 per cent in Canada ([Brown 2024](#)). The experiences of the US, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand tell us that investing in First Nations-led clean energy projects can deliver economic and social benefits to Indigenous communities while making the energy transition more likely to succeed by increasing critical stakeholder buy-in.

Significantly, the Albanese government has recognized the transformative potential of the energy transition. The Government came to power with goals to address climate change, speed up the energy transition, and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy. While in power, the Government has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, invest \$1.5 billion in clean energy technologies, and deliver the landmark First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024-2030 ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). That strategy, the outcome of rigorous consultation throughout Australia, was released in 2024. Its mandate is to enable better access to renewable energy for First Nations households and communities, empower equitable partnerships by raising First Nations awareness and planning about the clean energy transition, and support economic interests through implementing a First Nations clean energy business funding program and workforce ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). The Strategy was accompanied by an investment of \$70 million to facilitate implementation. Around this time, \$75 million was made available by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency to develop solar microgrids in remote communities and First Nations communities. These figures are small in comparison to the billions of dollars committed by the Government to the green energy transition overall, and unlikely to be sufficient insofar as there are more than 1,100 discrete Indigenous communities in Australia. Nevertheless, policy developments like those introduced by the Albanese government are urgently needed and an important step in the right direction.

Yet while policy progress is crucial, we argue that meaningful and durable progress demands more than new policies. It demands an entirely new way of thinking about the energy transition, the role of the state, and the state's relationship with Indigenous people. This new way of thinking is captured in the idea of Green Energy Statecraft (GES) ([Thurbon et al. 2024](#)). In this short position paper, we advocate for a GES that is inclusive of First Nations in Australia. We elaborate the GES concept and show how GES-style thinking and acting has inspired First Nations involvement in energy transition in the US, Canada, and Aotearoa and how it could do the same in Australia.

## Unlocking Transformative Potential through Green Energy Statecraft

Throughout history, energy transitions have transformed societies and the human relationships that underpin them ([Miller et al. 2013](#); [Fischer-Kowalski et al. 2019](#)). Previous energy transitions have catalyzed the wholesale reordering of entrenched social relations both nationally and internationally ([Lee & Yang 2019](#)). In the transition from wood to coal, oil, and gas we witnessed the emergence of industrial labor and unions, migration to cities, and revamped international relations between fuel providers and consumers. These were not just material but also social and political transformations with the expansion of labor laws, franchise, and democracy. Political theorist [Timothy Mitchell \(2013\)](#) in *Carbon Democracy* reveals how the apparently limitless energy which crude oil provided instigated the rise of mass democracies in the West—and exacerbated authoritarianism in oil producing nations in the Middle East.

In this way of thinking about history, the green energy transition represents a window of opportunity to reimagine the social contract within our country, to benefit all Australians. And one of our most transformative opportunities is to use the energy transition to reset relations between settler Australians and Australia's First Nations people with a view to creating a more just, prosperous, and globally admired society. A productive lens through which to advance this national reimagining and re-setting is the lens of GES which describes a unique approach to both conceptualizing and governing the green transition and the state's strategic role in it ([Thurbon et al. 2024](#)). Policymakers who practice GES view the energy transition as an opportunity to address their nation's complex economic, energy, environmental, and social challenges in one hit by building the new green industries of the future and becoming a prosperous green role model for the world. More specifically, GES involves:

a belief on the part of political and policy leaders (further reflected in organisational culture and official policy documents) that by rapidly building and scaling new green energy industries, they can reduce fossil fuel import dependence, boosting energy security; they can create the new high-tech, high-wage, high-skilled jobs and export industries of the future, boosting economic security; they can rapidly reduce carbon emissions, boosting environmental security; and they can promote a just and inclusive transition that will enhance human flourishing and strengthen social cohesion, mitigating current political polarisation. For some well-positioned countries, especially those with sustainable competitive advantages in critical resources, the energy shift can also underpin the projection of a green superpower image abroad, attracting allies and investment and boosting military security ([Thurbon et al. 2024](#), p. 4).

In sum, GES involves a highly ambitious and strategic approach to governing the green transition to advance a comprehensive national security enhancing agenda—one that seeks to maximize not only military security and geo-strategic goals (implied by conventional understandings of 'statecraft'), but economic, energy, environmental and socio-political security goals as well.

Effective GES demands that policymakers adopt a diplomatic disposition toward their nation's key energy and economic partners. In the Australian context, this means that our policymakers must treat our country's major energy and economic partners and allies – such as Japan and South Korea – with the diplomatic sensitivity, seriousness, and respect they deserve. They must view these nations as crucial partners in the green transition and take care to deeply understand their long-term economic, energy, environmental, and geostrategic needs – and how Australia can help meet them. They must do so because the quality of Australia's economic and political relations with these foreign nations will significantly shape the success of our green transition, and our ability to fully unlock its transformative economic and social potential ([Richardson 2022](#)).

GES extends this same logic to approaching relations with nations *within* a country's borders – to First Nations. In the Australian context, this means that Australian policymakers should bring the same

diplomatic disposition, sensitivity, and seriousness to their dealings with Indigenous Australia. Indigenous Australians are, after all, the Traditional Owners of the land upon which industrial-scale wind and solar farms and green hydrogen exports will be developed. Consider the fact that 57.8% of critical minerals projects in Australia are located where First Nations peoples have a right to negotiate ([Burton et al. 2024](#)). Throughout the world, Indigenous and local people have protested renewable energy infrastructure ([Fish & Zeunart 2025](#)) on their customary lands and academics have interpreted these projects as forms of injustice, colonialism, and dispossession ([Walker et al. 2021](#)). Logic (and decency) thus dictates that Australia's First Nations should be recognized as crucial partners in Australia's green transition – partners whose economic and social needs must be deeply understood and met if we are to unleash the full transformative potential of the green energy shift. Within GES, the 2024 First Nations Clean Energy Strategy ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)) is a critical initial stage of co-developing renewable energy in Australia—but more needs to be done.

For GES to be politically sustainable it is important that it is instigated by both a grassroots citizenry and the politically powerful. This was the case with Bushlight, a 2003–2013 program to decarbonise the Aboriginal homelands in the Northern Territories and Western Australia, through solar microgrids. A response to Australia signing the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, Bushlight began with Safeguarding the Future Climate Policy in the same year, which created the federal agency, the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) ([Bushlight 2011](#)). One of the endeavors of the AGO, documented by [Cain \(2024, 2025\)](#) was Measures for a Better Environment and through it the Renewable Remote Power Generation Program (RRPGP) which subsidized half the cost of replacing diesel generators with solar energy systems. It also funded the Indigenous Community Support Program (ICSP) whose goal of supporting Indigenous communities transition manifested in financial support for Bushlight. In this manner international and national pressure as well as a social movement met to instigate this rare example of GES in Australia and for Indigenous Australians.

These top–down forces met the social factors of the Homeland movement. Beginning in the 1970s and led by First Nations and designed for self-determination on Country, the Homelands movement was a return to communities' cultural lands. Access to reliable energy motivated this return. Under the motto 'light and life in the bush,' the Bushlight teams consulted with Homeland communities and developed and deployed 265 solar power systems in 220 communities, the goal being contributing to planetary and local decarbonization as well as community empowerment. Bushlight was not ideal for all who accessed its energy, but it worked, providing 24-hour electricity so that First Nations communities could have more dignified lives. One resident reported, 'Now I only have to get 2 jerry cans of diesel a week (\$40). I used to spend \$350 on a 44-gallon drum every fortnight. I don't need to go to town as much because I buy less' ([Cain 2025](#), p. 10). 'The accountability of the project extended beyond just electricity supply to its social impact' for Homelands people, other citizens of Australia, and indeed the planet ([Cain 2024](#), p. 9).

Such programs are insecure, however, dependent as they are on support from political parties and coalitions that are temporary and may see support for energy regimes as strategic targets for gamesmanship against opposition political parties. (The current Trump Administration's attack on the Biden's administration Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and its renewable energy provisions is a contemporary case in point). This was the situation with Bushlight which was shuttered in 2013. An explanation is that its 'self-determination-era philosophy for working with communities increasingly placed it out of step with prevailing policy trends' ([Cain 2024](#), p. 10). Through its existence, however, Bushlight showed how 'different futures for both the planet and for Indigenous people's lives on Country' can be mediated by renewable energy ([Cain 2025](#), p. 6).

Another important and more recent inspired example of GES is the aforementioned First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024–2030 ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). Exhibiting the willingness

of the Commonwealth government to engage in GES, the Australia Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water supported the development of the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy to advise the National Energy Transformation Partnership, a framework to lead Australia towards net zero by 2050. This involved a series of eight public roundtables involving hundreds of stakeholders across all Australian states and territories in 2023 (excluding Tasmania) where First Nations participants shared their desired role in Australia's energy transition. In addition to access to clean energy, protection of the environment and heritage, and employment, owning community and utility scale renewable energy projects was at the top of their desired outcomes ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). These roundtables brought together the actors involved in GES—representatives of governments, developers and First Nations individuals, and expressed a desire for energy justice.

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy was provoked in part by the increasing requests by renewable energy developers for access to First Nations lands governed by Native Title, the Land Rights Act, and Aboriginal freehold as exhibited in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Proposed Indigenous owned renewable energy projects in Australia (adapted from [First Nations Clean Energy Network 2024](#))

Name		First Nations involved	Developers	Own %	Type	Status
Larrakia Energy	NT	Larrakia Development Corporation, Larrakia Energy	Larrakia Energy, Progressive Green Solutions	NA	Solar	Announced
Ngardara 'Sun' Project	NT	Yanyuwa, Marra, Garrwa, Gudanji and Binbingka people	Original Power	100	Solar	Feasibility
Marlinja Community Solar	NT	Marlinja community	Original Power	100	Solar	Feasibility
Desert Springs Octopus	NT	Larrakia Nation, Jawoyn Association	Octopus Investment Australia, Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network	>50	Solar	MOU
Thargomindah Station Regeneration Project	QLD	Kullilli Bulloo River Aboriginal Corporation (KBRAC)	Climate Friendly, Clean Energy Regulator	NA	Carbon farming	Announced
H2-Hub™ Gladstone	QLD	Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang Bunda Peoples Aboriginal Corporation	Hydrogen Utility® (H2U)	NA	Hydrogen, ammonia	MOU

Table 1. continued

Name		First Nations involved	Developers	Own %	Type	Status
Djandori gung-i	QLD	Gidarjil Development Corporation, Gurang and Gooreng Gooreng, First Nations Greentime Energy Group	Sunshine Hydro, Energy Estate, Burnett Mary Regional Group	20	Hydro, Hydrogen, Wind	MOU
Wujal Microgrid	QLD	Eastern Kuku Yalanji	Volt Advisory	100	Hydro, Solar	Announced
Yoorndoo Ilga Solar	SA	Barngarla People Determination Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC)	Larrakia Energy, Progressive Green Solutions	NA	Solar, Battery	Announced
Goulburn Murray Woka Yurringa Project	VIC	Yurringa Energy	Valorify	NA	Biogas	Feasibility
East Kimberley Clean Energy Project	WA	Balanggarra Ventures Corporation, MG Corporation, Kimberley Land Council	Pollination	75	Solar, Hydrogen	Feasibility
Western Green Energy Hub	WA	Mirning Traditional Lands Aboriginal Corporation, Mirning Green Energy Limited	InterContinental Energy, CWP Global, KEPCO	10	Hydrogen, Solar, Wind	Announced
Yindjibarndi Energy	WA	Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation	ACEN, Rio Tinto	25-50	Solar, Battery, Wind	Feasibility
Tjiwarl Katu Power	WA	Tjiwarl Aboriginal Corporation	Zenith Energy	80	Solar, Wind, Battery	Announced
Junja Solar Farm	WA	Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation	Pilbara Solar	50	Solar	Feasibility
[no projects announced]	WA	Gerry Matera, Noongar, Boya Energy	Infinite Blue Energy	100	Solar, Hydrogen	Announced

The stages of implementation for Indigenous ownership of renewable energy industries begins with memoranda of understanding, the announcement of the partnership, feasibility studies, construction, and operation. Of these 16 examples, three have reached the stage where they have signed a memorandum of understanding, seven have been announced, six have undergone a feasibility study, and none are under construction or operational.

A diplomatic relationship with First Nations would be based on equal partnership, dignity, and respected autonomy. But while First Nations in the United States are treated diplomatically as ‘domestic dependent



nations,' securing for Native Americans some autonomy in self-governance, this is not the case in Australia. One manifestation of GES for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty would be enhanced energy sovereignty through ownership of renewable energy industries. [Table 1](#) above presents some positive developments in this direction as do the recommendations of First Nations Clean Energy Strategy ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). With a diplomatic orientation coming from political leadership, this trend towards energy justice can grow.

## Benefits of a Green Energy Statecraft for Indigenous Ownership of Renewable Energy

Indigenous ownership of renewable energy industry (IORE) could be one domestic objective of GES. Indigenous-owned projects offer Indigenous communities decision-making power and control over a project's planning, management, employment, and revenues and can strengthen the goals of energy justice. It has its risks but of many types of relationships First Nations can have with renewable energy systems, ownership provides the highest degree of agency over how projects are implemented and potential for economic benefits ([Brookshire & Kaza 2013](#)). In addition, IORE can contribute to the pursuit of reconciliation and decolonization by improving Western business and Indigenous relations ([Walker et al. 2021](#)), giving First Nations communities control over renewable energy resources ([Hoicka et al. 2021](#)) and putting energy utilities and Indigenous people on relative footing ([Miller & Parkins 2023](#)).

Depending upon the diplomatic regime executed in the nation-state, Indigenous communities' involvement in renewable energy industries has varied throughout the world. The contrasts are no more apparent than throughout three former colonies of the British Empire—the United States, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand where IORE is present—and Australia, where it has yet to fully develop (see [Table 1](#)). In these countries, treaties, fiscal policies, and Indigenous organisations enable IORE, in other places without a treaty with First Nations such as Australia, IORE is yet to materialise beyond the discourse of renewable energy developers, Indigenous activists, and their allies. Risks exist in co-ownership such as indebtedness, liability, and delayed reception of benefits. Debt in particular is concerning as it needs to be first repaid before benefits are accessed—a difficult arrangement for communities with immediate needs. We suggest that First Nations communities have access to sound advice regarding the risks of co-ownership—a feature that could be included with GES.

A number of bureaucratic barriers exist to deter IORE, impediments that could be overcome with the embrace of GES. For example, external barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait IORE originate from unresolved colonial era conflicts over land, self-determination, and sovereignty ([Maddison & Thomas 2023](#), [Sutton 2003](#)). These historical and structural inequities manifest for some Native American communities as challenges securing loans and difficulties capitalizing on tax credits ([Zimmerman & Reames 2021](#)). Federal bureaucratic inefficiency for Native Americans requires the Bureau of Indian Affairs to authorize contractual agreements on reservations causing delays and slowing the permitting process. Indigenous communities across Canada are challenged in their ownership in the renewable energy industry by the vertical integration of energy systems and monopolies over generation, transmission, and distribution ([Leonhardt et al. 2023](#)). These and other issues make it difficult for First Nations in Native America to understand the value of their energy resource, acquire permits, establish transmission lines, find buyers, and finance their operations ([Zimmerman & Reames 2021](#)). While the barriers to IORE may be embedded in colonial path dependencies, bureaucratic exclusions, and race-based discriminations, as we suggested above, energy transitions are opportunities for radical change ([Fischer-Kowalski et al. 2019](#), [Miller et al. 2013](#), [Mitchell 2013](#), [Lee & Yang 2019](#)). GES affords an opportunity for IORE in Australia.

Examples of positive diplomatic and fiscal policies capable of influencing IORE can be found in the US, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand. In terms of diplomatic policies, treaty rights confirmed by the

Constitution in the United States—while they are often ignored—enable tribes like the Moapa Southern Paiute in Nevada to sell energy to Los Angeles from their 250MW Moapa Southern Paiute Solar Project. The Navajo Nation of Arizona retails power to the state of Utah from their Kayenta Solar Program (personal communication, Glenn Steiger, executive consultant, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, June 2023). The Mokai Power Station, in Aotearoa New Zealand, is 75% owned by a Māori iwi or tribe—a right to land entitled by Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of Waitangi. Likewise, because of land rights that largely stem from treaties, Canadian Indigenous communities lead the world in IORE where they have been involved for 20 years in renewable energy industries ([Henderson & Sanders 2018](#)). Of the 197 examples of IORE in Canada, 41 have half, whole, or majority Indigenous ownership ([Hoicka et al. 2021](#)). This ensures Canadian Indigenous communities a degree of financial interest and authorization over these projects ([Hoicka & MacArthur 2018](#)). Beyond financial gains, benefits include the right to negotiate revenue-sharing, leasing agreements, and partnership schemes for Indigenous communities ([Bledsoe 2023](#)). Most colonial statecraft is detrimental to the lives and autonomy of Indigenous peoples, but this potted collection of optimistic examples shows that the benefits of IORE can result from statecraft—both by the First Nation and the colonizing nation. With energy transition happening, so too should a revision of historical wrongs towards progressive futures.

GES that is inclusive of First Nations should ideally begin with the diplomatic work of treaty making. In comparison to the other nations involved in the CANZUS alliance, Canada, New Zealand, and United States, a major factor inhibiting IORE in Australia is the absence of a treaty. Treaties necessitate state relations that are diplomatic and lateral instead of bureaucratic and top-down ([Thomas & Maddison 2024](#)). The Constitution of the United States grants the right to negotiate treaties with Native American tribes and the Indian Tribal Energy and Self-Determination Act of 2008 provides Tribal Nations with the ability to make decisions about development activities such as renewable energy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people of Australia signed no treaty with the British Empire and the 1835 policy of *terra nullius* enabled British settlement in Australia which was claimed to be ‘land belonging to nobody’ ([Sutton 2003](#)).

The legal principle of *terra nullius* underpinned the British colonisation of Australia. It was successfully challenged in the High Court’s decision, remembered as the Mabo case in 1992. The Mabo judgement formed the basis for the Native Title Act of 1993. Predating this was the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA) (1976) which was the first land rights regime in Australia but only applies to the Northern Territory. Successful land claims made under ALRA give parties inalienable freehold title. Under the Native Title Act a community can register a Native Title claim with the National Native Title Council. If the court proceeding determines that they are Native Title holders, they can form a prescribed body corporate which can hold and manage the community’s interests. First Nations of Australia can also establish a corporation and register it under the Corporations Act of 2001.

As of today, several prescribed body corporations are established towards the goal of IORE ([Fish & Nehme 2024](#)). Legislation in Australia thus has attempted to rectify the absence of a treaty and establish something akin to the domestic dependent yet diplomatic relationship held between the United States and Native Americans ([Morris 1985](#)). This is a convoluted pathway towards the domestic diplomatic relationship necessary for the Indigenous benefit potentially made possible by GES—but this is the existing framework for energy justice in Australia. This confusing and geographically disparate regime of rights and land returns is a result of both settler-colonial politics but also tendencies towards centralization, particularly in the Labor governments and High Court of Australia (Markham & Norman forthcoming). Into this uneven terrain, GES could be effective in setting the normative conditions for IORE through encouraging and rewarding co-ownership agreements through fiscal incentives across the federal system.

In Australia, renewable energy companies are beginning to negotiate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island folks about project collaboration ([Chandrashekeran 2021](#)). States can do more to incentivize corporations partnering with First Nations. Consider the relationship between the Yindjibarndi Aboriginal



Corporation (YAC), which has a Native Title determination in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, and ACEN Australia, a renewable energy company. YAC chief executive Michael Woodley said, ‘We actually initiated this whole structure .... We said we wanted to be part of renewables, so we went and set up a business called Yiyangu’ (quoted in [Fish & Nehme 2024](#), p. 215). Through the establishment of a wholly owned subsidiary, Yiyangu Pty Ltd, the YAC established a partnership with ACEN Australia to create Yindjibarndi Energy Corporation Pty Ltd (YEC). Through this partnership, the Yindjibarndi approve project sites on Yindjibarndi Ngurra, they hold equity participation of between 25 and 50 per cent in projects, and employment preferences are given to Yindjibarndi people. Importantly, the Yindjibarndi people have equity ownership in the form of shares in YEC. In this case, the NTA, which enabled the Native Title process, is a tool of domestic statecraft not GES *per se*. But this case does show how energy justice—in the form of economic benefits and oversight—and GES can co-occur when corporations and First Nations are willing to partner and utilize legal structures.

On a basic level, this corporate social responsibility exhibited in this example can be satisfied with free, prior, informed, and consensual collaboration with First Nations ([O’Neill et al. 2021](#)). Such social accounting appears to be on the rise but remains optional for renewable energy companies throughout most of Australia. Mandating co-ownership might begin with procurement policies that necessitate contracting with businesses owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as is the case in the state of New South Wales ([New South Wales Government 2022](#)). In this manner, GES through encouraging best practices could work through the private sector.

Legislation can encourage IORE. The US Department of Energy provides grants for Native American renewable energy through the authorization of the 1992 Energy Policy Act, the 2005 Energy Policy Act, and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act ([Grosse & Mark 2023](#)). Indigenous Canadians have access to federal, provincial, and utility-based financing schemes to provide equity and co-ownership for renewable energy projects ([Kung et al. 2022](#)) including the Energy Investment Tax Credit which dedicates \$80 billion to sustainable infrastructure and boosts funding for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects ([Government of Canada 2023](#)). Canadian provinces, notably British Columbia, legislated minimum co-ownership percentages and provided low interest loans and other means for First Nations communities ([Krupa et al. 2025](#)). Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia both lack similar climate legislation that incorporates First Nations in energy transition, but the 2024 First Nations Clean Energy Strategy in Australia seeks to rectify this omission ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)). GES may work through incentivizing discourse within business and encourage development through government initiatives that correlate with cultural activism within Indigenous communities.

## What is holding Australia back?

The absence of a treaty should not stop Australian policymakers from learning lessons from North America and elsewhere. Like their North American counterparts, Australian policymakers could start by adopting a diplomatic sensibility in their green energy engagement with First Nations communities – especially in response to the strongly stated desire of these communities to be included in – and contribute to – our nation’s green energy transition. The Australian government needs to follow the recommendations of the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy ([Commonwealth of Australia 2024](#)), use substantial fiscal policies to incentivize First Nations sovereignty over renewable resources, and fund capabilities training so First Nations communities can manage these resources on Country into the future.

As mentioned, energy transitions and political revolutions correlate ([Fischer-Kowalski et al. 2019](#)). Energy innovation sets the stage for ‘social innovations’ such as new ways of governing and organizing communities and incentivizing climate-friendly practices ([Hoppe & De Vries 2018](#)). Describing the work of Australia’s energy and economic policymakers as ‘statecraft’ can help sharpen their focus and lift their

ambition (Thurbon et al. 2024). Embracing GES and adopting a diplomatic disposition – dynamically inclusive of First Nations as custodians – could be revolutionary, correcting the absence of treaties and centuries of economic exclusion. Australia cannot afford to lose the strategic advantage of our renewable energy resources and remain behind the social innovations happening elsewhere in the world.

Transition to renewable energy cannot occur without caring for the values, identities, and priorities of local and Indigenous people. Because of a range of external and internal factors, Indigenous people in CANZUS states own or may own renewable energy industries. This position paper describes and theorizes how GES can enhance equitable involvement of First Nations in energy transition. Treaty-making, legislation, fiscal policies, and other government incentives are part of the tool kit of the GES policymaker engaging collaboratively with First Nations. It is hoped that this paper can inform future GES for IORE in Australia and beyond.

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