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BudgetConsultation@act.gov.au

Budget Submission – 2024-25 ACT Budget

The Smart Energy Council is grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission to the ACT Government in preparation for the 2024-25 Budget.

The Smart Energy Council (SEC) is Australia's peak independent body for renewables including solar, batteries, and renewable hydrogen. The Council has more than 1400 members and 65 years of experience in the sector having been established by the photovoltaic pioneers in the 1950 and 60s who designed and built some of the world's first solar panels and solar hot water systems.

The global landscape is marked by a fervent race in technology, commerce, and finance, precipitated by the ongoing transition towards renewable energy and the escalating consequences of climate change and associated risks.

The climate crisis and the global move to zero emissions present Australia with an unparalleled opportunity for investment, job creation, and exporting climate change solutions.

Household Renewable Energy initiatives reduce cost of living pressures for ACT families

The Smart Energy Council offers initiatives that will assist ACT residents with real-world hip-pocket solutions to reduce their energy costs.

The ACT Government is leading the nation in investment in household renewables, the Smart Energy Council believes this is a story that could and should be explained to the ACT and held up as an example to other states.

This submission outlines these key investments in some detail, whilst also highlighting other areas of policy action that should be taken by the ACT Government to help deliver a job-maximising net zero economy as soon as possible.

THE INDEPENDENT BODY FOR THE SMART ENERGY INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA

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**PUTTING ENERGY
INTO ACTION**

The Smart Energy Council's priorities for the 2024-25 ACT Budget are the following:

Increased investment for families and low-income earners in the take-up of smart energy products and electrification of households.

The ACT Government should invest in the following:

Families Smart Energy Package - The ACT Government should increase the funding for the Sustainable Household Scheme (including the Community Solar Banks program) to be extended at the current rate of funding, until 2028-29. The program should also increase the maximum possible loan for household batteries from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Public and Social Housing Package – The ACT Government should make an allocation for an additional amount of funding for this year and request matched funding from the Federal Government. The funding should be enough to facilitate an additional 10% of the ACT's public and social housing stock being upgraded with household energy generation, storage and energy-efficient products.

Healthy Smart Energy Package - \$50 million over 4 years to promote the use of household energy-efficient homes that are disconnected from gas.

ACT Renewables Home Centre

The ACT Government should commit \$5 million in funding for the creation of a permanent renewable home centre in Canberra to showcase the Government support for consumer energy resources and to physically show the pathway for households to reduce their cost of living by investing in home renewable energy generation, storage and smart energy household products.

ACT National Renewables Conference and Exhibition

The ACT Government should invest \$3 million over 4 years to bring a national Renewables Conference and Exhibition to Canberra to showcase the nation's capital as a place where the entire renewable energy ecosystem can do business and thrive.

ACT Renewables Hub continuation

The ACT Government should invest an additional \$150,000 per annum (\$600,000 over the next 4 years) to continue to support the enormously successful ACT Renewables Hub.

Should you wish to discuss these matters further, please contact Wayne Smith, External Affairs Manager, on 0417 141 812.

John Grimes

Chief Executive, Smart Energy Council

1. Increased investment for families and low-income earners in the take-up of smart energy products and electrification of households.

Families Smart Energy Package

The ACT Government should consider a Families Smart Energy Package building on its significant investments in household renewable energy to date.

The ACT Community Solar Banks program, with the ACT committing \$180 million matched by the federal government, is a highly commendable program allowing those living in flats or apartments to gain access to the cheapest and cleanest form of energy being rooftop solar. The SEC recommends that this program should be extended given that around 1 in 5 ACT citizens live in flats or apartments, with a doubling of the program and request matched funding from the federal government.

The Sustainable Household Scheme, providing interest-free loans for smart household energy products, has proven to be successful with the \$193 million in funding being provided to date through the Scheme. The Smart Energy Council encourages the ACT Government to provide a further extension of the Scheme of another \$100 million in the next budget and uses this funding to increase the maximum loan amount beyond \$15,000, which was found in the [SHS Review 2023](#) to be a main prevention for additional uptake in the Scheme. This should be increased to \$20,000 if the household should choose to take up a consumer battery.

Spending on the Sustainable Household Scheme, which includes the Solar Banks program is due to end in FY 2024-25. We urge the ACT government to extend this out until FY 2028-29 to ensure families can benefit from the smart energy products on offer, which will only serve to strengthen the community's power grid.

Public and Social Housing Package

The 2023-24 Federal Budget allocated \$300 million held to the Household Energy Upgrades fund to support upgrades to social housing to save energy

The ACT Government commendably matched this funding and announced a program to roll out the funding before all the other states.

The ACT Government should make an allocation for an additional amount of funding for this year and request matched funding from the Federal Government. The funding should be enough to facilitate an

additional 10% of the ACT's public and social housing stock being upgraded with household energy generation, storage and energy-efficient products.

Healthy Smart Energy Package

The ACT Government should create a Healthy Smart Energy Package to support existing households with their transition to an all-electric, healthy home by contributing to the cost (approximately \$1,000 per home) of removing gas supply to space and water heating and cooking from homes.

Aside from the emissions savings resultant from this Package, the ACT would also be improving indoor air quality and the health and lives of Australian families and their children.

The Smart Energy Council recommends \$50 million in ACT government funding be allocated to this program over the next 4 year period.

The ACT Government should invest in the following:

Families Smart Energy Package - The ACT Government should increase the funding for the Sustainable Household Scheme (including the Community Solar Banks program) to be extended at the current rate of funding, until 2028-29. The program should also increase the maximum possible loan for household batteries from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Public and Social Housing Package – The ACT Government should make an allocation for an additional amount of funding for this year and request matched funding from the Federal Government. The funding should be enough to facilitate an additional 10% of the ACT's public and social housing stock being upgraded with household energy generation, storage and energy-efficient products.

Healthy Smart Energy Package - \$50 million over 4 years to promote the use of household energy efficient homes that are disconnected from gas.

2. ACT Renewables Home Centre

A permanent renewables home centre in Canberra would serve as a flagship hub for renewable energy innovation, education, and demonstration in Australia. This state-of-the-art facility would be strategically located in the nation's capital, symbolising the commitment of Australia to leading in the renewable energy sector.

The centre would include:

- **Exhibition and Demonstration Area:** Interactive displays and working models of renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels, wind turbines, and battery storage systems, would allow visitors to see firsthand how these technologies work. This area could also showcase the latest advancements in green building materials and energy-efficient designs.
- **Research and Development (R&D) Laboratories:** Dedicated spaces for scientists, engineers, and technologists to conduct research on new renewable energy technologies and solutions. These labs would facilitate partnerships between academic institutions, industry, and government bodies, driving innovation and commercialisation of renewable energy products.
- **Education and Training Facilities:** Classrooms and workshops equipped to offer courses, seminars, and hands-on training for students, professionals, and the general public on renewable energy technologies, sustainability practices, and policy implications. These programs would aim to build a skilled workforce for the renewable energy sector and raise public awareness about the benefits of renewable energy.
- **Policy and Advocacy Hub:** A dedicated space for discussions, meetings, and collaborations among policymakers, industry leaders, and renewable energy advocates. This hub would focus on shaping effective renewable energy policies, fostering public-private partnerships, and promoting Australia's renewable energy agenda both domestically and internationally.
- **Community Engagement Spaces:** Areas designed for public events, exhibitions, and community meetings that promote community involvement in renewable energy projects and sustainability initiatives. These spaces would facilitate dialogue and collaboration among community members, businesses, and government entities.
- **Green Spaces and Renewable Energy Installations:** The centre itself would be a model of sustainability, powered by on-site renewable energy installations. Green spaces, including gardens and green roofs, would not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the centre but also serve educational purposes by demonstrating the integration of renewable energy and environmental conservation in urban settings.
- **Technology Incubator and Start-Up Support:** A platform to support start-ups and entrepreneurs in the renewable energy sector, offering mentorship, funding assistance, and access to R&D facilities. This would encourage innovation and support the growth of new businesses in the renewable energy market.

A permanent renewables home centre in Canberra would be a comprehensive facility that embodies the future of energy in Australia. It would play a crucial role in advancing renewable energy technologies, fostering education and innovation, and promoting sustainable practices among the Australian public and beyond.

The ACT Government should commit \$5 million in funding for the creation of a permanent renewables home in centre in Canberra.

3. ACT National Renewables Conference and Exhibition

The ACT should hold an ambition to host a significant National Renewables Conference and Exhibition.

The ACT's commitment to sustainability and renewable energy initiatives offers a conducive backdrop for such a significant event, providing a model of what can be achieved at a national level.

The ACT has been at the forefront of Australia's transition to renewable energy. Hosting a national conference and exhibition in the ACT would leverage this leadership position, inspiring other states and territories to accelerate their renewable energy initiatives.

As the nation's capital, Canberra is a central meeting point for policymakers, industry leaders, and academics from across Australia. Its strategic location facilitates the attendance of key stakeholders involved in shaping Australia's energy future, including representatives from federal, state, and local governments, making it an ideal venue for fostering national collaboration and policy dialogue.

Sustainable Event Hosting: Canberra's commitment to sustainability extends to its event hosting capabilities. The city offers venues that adhere to high environmental standards, capable of accommodating large gatherings with minimal ecological impact. This aligns with the ethos of a renewables conference, demonstrating best practices in sustainable event management.

The ACT community is highly engaged in environmental and renewable energy issues. Hosting the conference in Canberra can tap into this engaged community, fostering public participation and raising awareness about the importance of renewable energy. It also offers an opportunity to showcase community-led initiatives to a national audience.

The ACT's proven commitment to renewable energy, combined with its strategic location, expertise, and infrastructure, makes it an exemplary host for a national renewables conference and exhibition. Such an event would not only highlight the ACT's achievements but also serve as a catalyst for advancing Australia's renewable energy agenda, fostering collaboration, innovation, and policy development across the nation.

The ACT Government should invest \$3 over 4 years to bring a national Renewables Conference and Exhibition to Canberra to showcase the nations capital as a place where the entire renewable energy ecosystem can do business and thrive.

4. ACT Renewables Hub continuation

The ACT Renewables Hub (the Hub) was an initiative by the ACT Government as part of its industry development strategy to grow the renewable energy ecosystem. Funded via the \$12m Renewable Energy Innovation Fund, the Hub has been in operation since 2016 and since then has helped accelerate several innovative start-ups. In July 2021, the Smart Energy Council was contacted for 12 months to deliver a new phase of Hub development by building ever-stronger links between local, national, and international partners.

The Hub has been a huge success connecting SMEs, Government, Academia, Corporate Australia, Industry bodies, tradies, and consultants into a close-knit community that works together to achieve for the ACT's renewable future.



The SEC seeks additional support to continue the Hub and continue to update its website, directory and events. As the renewable industry grows, the ACT cannot rest of being a first mover and achieved 100% net renewable electricity. A revitalised Hub can help maintain the ACT's network of renewable companies and advocates and position Canberra as the nation-leader and smart energy city. supp

The SEC seeks \$150,000 for 12 months to maintain and grow the Hub wants including through regular networking events, mentoring services, Hub marketing and sponsorship activities. In line with the proposed ACT Renewable Home Center and ACT National Renewables Conference, the Hub will bring all

opportunities under one brand and network and act as a central connection point for national and international partners. Revitalising the contract would include the following opportunities:

- Renewable energy ecosystem building:
 - o running ACT based (in person where allowable) networking events for the Hub and wider renewables ecosystem at a minimum of once per quarter;
 - o developing new community initiatives to create and build connections between members of the Hub and the wider renewables ecosystem;
 - o identify opportunities to build valuable linkages between companies, researchers and policymakers within the framework of the ACT Renewable Energy Hub;
 - o fostering business relations and creating opportunities for collaboration between Hub network members, the wider renewable energy, cleantech, innovation and investor communities;
 - o harnessing the SEC's existing industry knowledge, stakeholder networks and relationships and a database of 40,000+ existing stakeholders nationwide;
 - o facilitating inbound investment by assisting member companies who are looking to establish Australian or regional headquarters in Australia and advocating for the ACT as an ideal national headquarters of choice;
 - o facilitating export opportunities for ACT companies who would like to promote their products and services in national and international markets; and
 - o coordinating inbound international and interstate visits and programs throughout the contract.
- Coordination of events, innovation/mentoring programs and capacity-building workshops:
 - o delivery of a minimum of one quarterly ACT-centric standalone event relating to innovation programs and workshops, mentoring programs, capacity building or technical training for Hub network members and broader renewable energy stakeholders;
 - o Conducting a minimum of once per quarter media release or event for ACT renewable energy businesses with the aim of building exposure of the ACT renewables industry; and
 - o allow hub members to access the SEC events and activities in the ACT provided through the SEC network.
- Hub network operations
 - o engaging with and encouraging potential members to join the Hub network;
 - o maintaining an online presence for the Hub, including a website and related social media;
 - o producing a monthly e-newsletter that, at a minimum, is an update on upcoming events and a summary of the past month's events;
 - o undertaking marketing activities to support the growth of the Hub and the promotion of the Hub's activities; and
 - o leveraging existing communication channels including e-newsletters, Smart Energy Magazine, regular webinars and local networking events to foster and build a sense of community specifically targeted at and supporting the ACT renewable community.

The ACT Government should invest an additional \$150,000 per annum (\$600,000 over the next 4 years) to continue to support the enormously successful ACT Renewables Hub.
