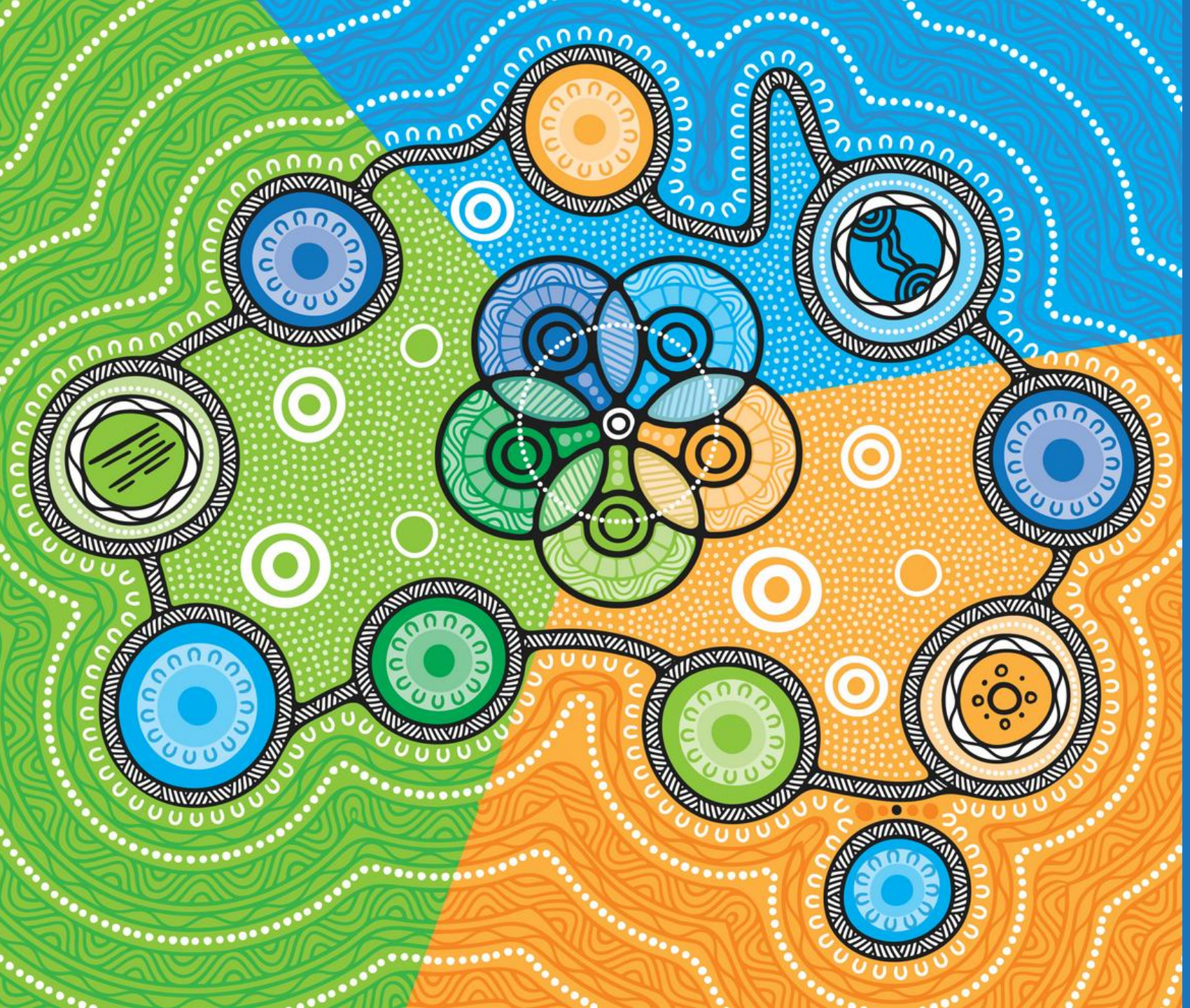


Joined at the “hip”

Sabiene Heindl
CEO I The Energy Charter

Social Licence Community of Practice



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and pay respect to their Elders, past and present.

We recognise and value the continuing rich culture and the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This artwork was created by Jordan Lovegrove. It tells the story of energy, how it connects all of Australia and the Energy Charter's commitment to create a better energy future for all Australians.



We share infrastructure. We share trust.

- Data centres depend on energy infrastructure — and energy infrastructure increasingly responds to data centre demand and loads
- Communities experience the combined impacts of both energy and data centres, not our sector boundaries
- Our social licence is interconnected, whether we plan for it or not

Key message: We are joined at the hip when it comes to earning and maintaining community trust or social licence.



Communities see the whole picture

- Communities (increasingly regional) experience the cumulative impacts of:
  - Electricity demand, network upgrades, transmission and generation build and energy costs
  - Water, land use, transport and local services
  - Workforce, housing and development pressures

The community question is simple: Who benefits, who pays — and who gets a say?

The energy sector has learned the hard way

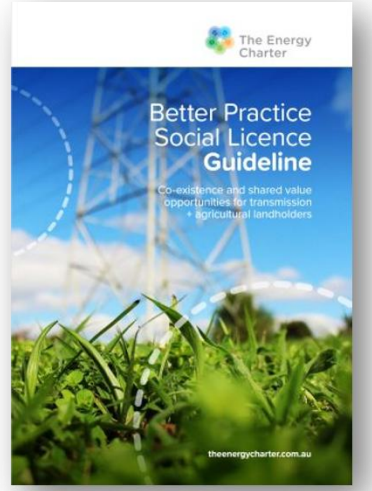
- × Engaging after major decisions are effectively made does not build trust
- × Project-by-project engagement misses cumulative impacts and opportunities
- × Promising community benefits without clear local priorities and accountability creates risk
- ✓ Social licence is earned through conduct, not communications.

The opportunity for data centres is to learn from our energy experience — rather than repeat our mistakes……





We've built the social licence frameworks



Better Practice Social Licence Guideline

- 22 Priority Actions co-developed with transmission businesses and stakeholders.
- Quarterly reporting to Ag Energy Taskforce and independently reviewed.
- Practical lessons on early engagement, landholder relationships, accountability and consistency.

Regional Energy Accord

- Taking these learnings further through a nationally connected, regionally led approach supported by Tony Mahar, AEIC and Cathy McGowan AO – Co-Chairs of the national Stewardship Council.
- Implementing the **Regional Energy Collaboration Framework** - a practical pathway for building place-based collaboration between regional leaders, communities and energy businesses.

Our frameworks and experience are not just for the energy sector. They provide a head start for data centres.



Social licence isn't sector-specific

Our better-practice principles + frameworks apply equally to data centres. We don't need competing social licence frameworks for interconnected infrastructure. We need shared better practice.

What we've learned	What it means for data centres
Engage early, before decisions are locked in	Communities can genuinely influence development
Understand cumulative impacts	Consider energy, water, housing and infrastructure together
Put communities at the centre	Start with local priorities, not project requirements
Share benefits fairly	Deliver meaningful, lasting regional value
Be transparent and accountable	Demonstrate what has changed and what has been delivered
Collaborate across industry	Reduce duplication and consultation fatigue





Regional Energy Accord: regions lead, industry collaborates

- The Regional Energy Accord is a national framework supporting locally led collaboration between regional communities, industry and government to deliver better outcomes from the energy transition
- Regional leaders determine whether to participate and identify their own priorities
- Industry works collectively rather than approaching communities project by project, supporting regional collaboration agreements
- Shared challenges — housing, workforce, infrastructure, local procurement and community benefits — become opportunities for coordinated action
- Agreed commitments create transparency and accountability
- National stewardship connects regions and enables learning.

The ambition = regional communities should lead and benefit from the transition (including data centres)— not simply host the infrastructure.



Data centres have a seat at the regional table

Data centres are part of the broader infrastructure ecosystem. For regions, their development can influence:

- Electricity demand, network investment and affordability
- Water resources and infrastructure
- Regional employment, skills and housing
- Local economic opportunities and community expectations

The **Regional Energy Accord** offers a pathway for data centres to work alongside energy businesses and regional leaders, rather than establish separate engagement and community benefit arrangements.

One region. Shared challenges. Collective responsibility.



If we get this right!

Data centres can become:

- Partners in regional development including through the Regional Energy Accord framework
- Catalysts for renewables and energy storage
- Contributors to community resilience
- Active partners in building trust in regional communities.

If sectors operate in silos, we risk amplifying the very trust challenges already slowing the energy transition.

Social licence is not owned by any one sector. In a transition of this scale, we either build it together – or erode it together.

Our invitation: let's get ahead of the curve together

- The energy sector has learned that social licence cannot be secured through individual project engagement alone
- We have practical frameworks, independent evidence, regional relationships and lessons worth sharing
- The opportunity now is to:
  - ✓ Share and adapt our better-practice frameworks with the data centre sector
  - ✓ Coordinate around cumulative impacts and shared infrastructure
  - ✓ Support data centres to participate in regionally led collaboration, including through the Regional Energy Accord
  - ✓ Demonstrate that cross-sector collaboration delivers better outcomes for customers and communities.

We either build trust together — or erode it together. #BetterTogether

