

# What drives community readiness? Behaviouralscience + social licence in renewable energy

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4 June 2026

The Energy Charter – Social Licence Community of Practice

**Evidn.**

- 01** Many of the biggest challenges in the energy transition are people's attitudes and behaviours
- 02** Methodically understanding what shapes attitudes and behaviour is important
- 03** Behavioural science offers strategies and a platform to better engage and understand people and communities



**Evidn.**

THE SCIENCE OF CHANGE

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**Behavioural Analysis  
& Change at Scale**





NEWS

# Sugar farmers 'major culprits' in reef pollution

16th Jun 2015 5:00 AM

f 0 t 11 COMMENTS



A WWF reef campaigner says sugarcane farming is to blame for much of the pollution of the Gr

## Farm practices hurting Great Barrier Reef: researcher

Updated 1 Jun 2007, 8:54am

**A four-year study of Queensland's coastline has found farming and development are damaging coral reefs.**

Researchers have studied 200-year-old coral skeletons from the Great Barrier Reef to chart changing water quality.

Marine researcher Professor Ove Heogh-Goldberg from the University of Queensland says the results show intense farming is sending harmful soil and chemicals into the ocean.

He says simple things like planting trees along creeks could help.



PHOTO: Researchers say Qld reefs are being damaged by land disturbances. (AFP)

*“Why won’t these cane farmers change?”*



# Psychology of Resistance

PREVIOUS WORK

## A Farmer Focused Renewables Playbook: Helping farmers navigate the energy transition

BOUNDLESS



PREVIOUS WORK

## Supporting landholder and community engagement with new energy infrastructure



Queensland  
Government



# The Psychology of Resistance

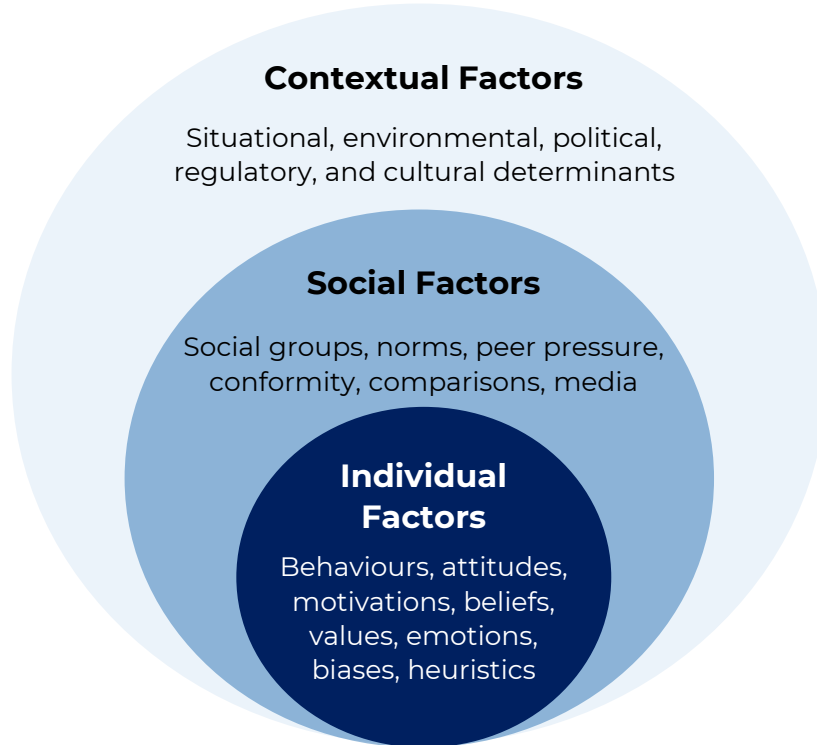
- 1 Our perceptions and opinions are shaped by a 'system' of factors
- 2 Group identity influences attitudes towards energy development
- 3 Perceived loss of control and agency heightens resistance
- 4 Over-reliance on benefits (over barriers) undermines trust
- 5 Lack of coordination creates scepticism and confusion



# 1 Our attitudes are shaped by a 'system' of factors

## Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Socio-Ecological Model of Human Behaviour



*"It's a conflicting space for me.*

*As a [producer], my priority is to continue providing Queensland with high-quality agricultural products.*

*But as a community member, I am grappling with the need to counteract climate change, while also acknowledging the impact the renewable energy rollout will have on my community."*



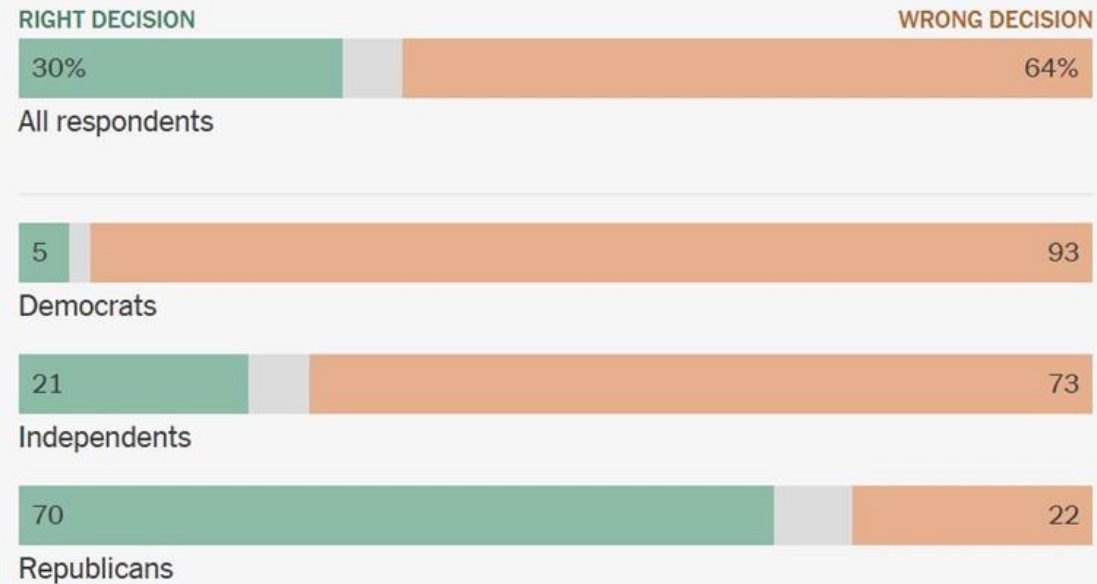
# Common Heuristics and Biases

- **Confirmation Bias**
  - Tendency to seek, notice, and believe information that confirms what we already think, while discounting disconfirming evidence.
- **Motivated Reasoning**
  - People don't process information neutrally. We interpret evidence in a way that protects our identity, values, group membership etc.
- **Information Deficit Fallacy**
  - Many strategies assume that if people had the "right facts," they would change their minds. This is not always (seldom) the case.

THE NEW YORK TIMES/SIENA POLL

MAY 11-15

Do you think Donald Trump's decision to go to war with Iran was **the right decision** or **the wrong decision**?



Based on a New York Times/Siena poll of 1,507 registered voters nationwide conducted May 11 to 15. The gray segment is for voters who did not respond or said they didn't know. Ashley Cai and Christine Zhang/The New York Times



Jerry Kirby Rachel Richardson for The New York Times

**“I have a lot of faith.”**

**Jerry Kirby, 60, of Cincinnati.** Mr. Kirby, a retiree who said he had never voted before Mr. Trump arrived on the political scene, described the increase in gas prices as a “bump in the road.” He voiced support for the president’s handling of the war, and said he would vote for Mr. Trump again if he could. “Iran should have been put in their place a long time ago,” he said.



Raven Hoskins Sam Easter for The New York Times

**“It’s affecting me in a lot of ways.”**

**Raven Hoskins, 27, of Grand Rapids, Mich.** Ms. Hoskins, a package handler who identifies as a political independent, said gas prices were making it harder for her to afford food, and she blamed the president. “A lot of people, especially of my color, think that he’s a really racist man, but I look at him like a businessman,” she said. “Him running us like a business — I’ve seen where it’s gotten us, and it’s not good.” She said she was unsure what she would do in the midterms.

EMERGING EVIDENCE

# Social Research Work to Support the Targeted Energy Information Program



# How do people engage with energy information?

## 1 Information overload increases reliance on defaults and shortcuts

When information is abundant, people rely on heuristic processing (i.e., who said it, what do others think about it).

Information seeking is reactive and episodic, spiking when projects become locally salient.

## 2 Information is interpreted through place and identity

Energy information is rarely received as neutral input. Place shapes how risk, benefits, and credibility are understood.

Factual accuracy alone is not sufficient to change behaviours or opinions.

## 3 Informal networks guide sensemaking in regional contexts

Informal networks (i.e., peers, local groups, or social media) can provide socially credible information when formal channels feel distant, fragmented, or untrusted.

## 4 Without context, more information can have unintended consequences

In contested information environments, more content can deepen scepticism, fatigue, or disengagement rather than support informed participation.

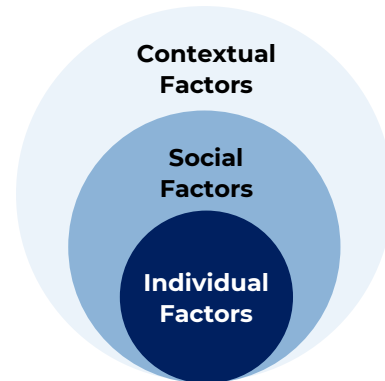
# Does context matter more than content?

Early observations suggest the main barrier is not absence of information, but conditions of its reception:

## Context

How information is received, processed, and shared:

- Trust environment
- Effects of media
- Reliance on informal networks



## Content

The artefacts about the message itself:

- Scientific and/or technical accuracy
- Completeness
- Visual appeal
- Relevance



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## Group Identity Influences Attitudes Toward Development

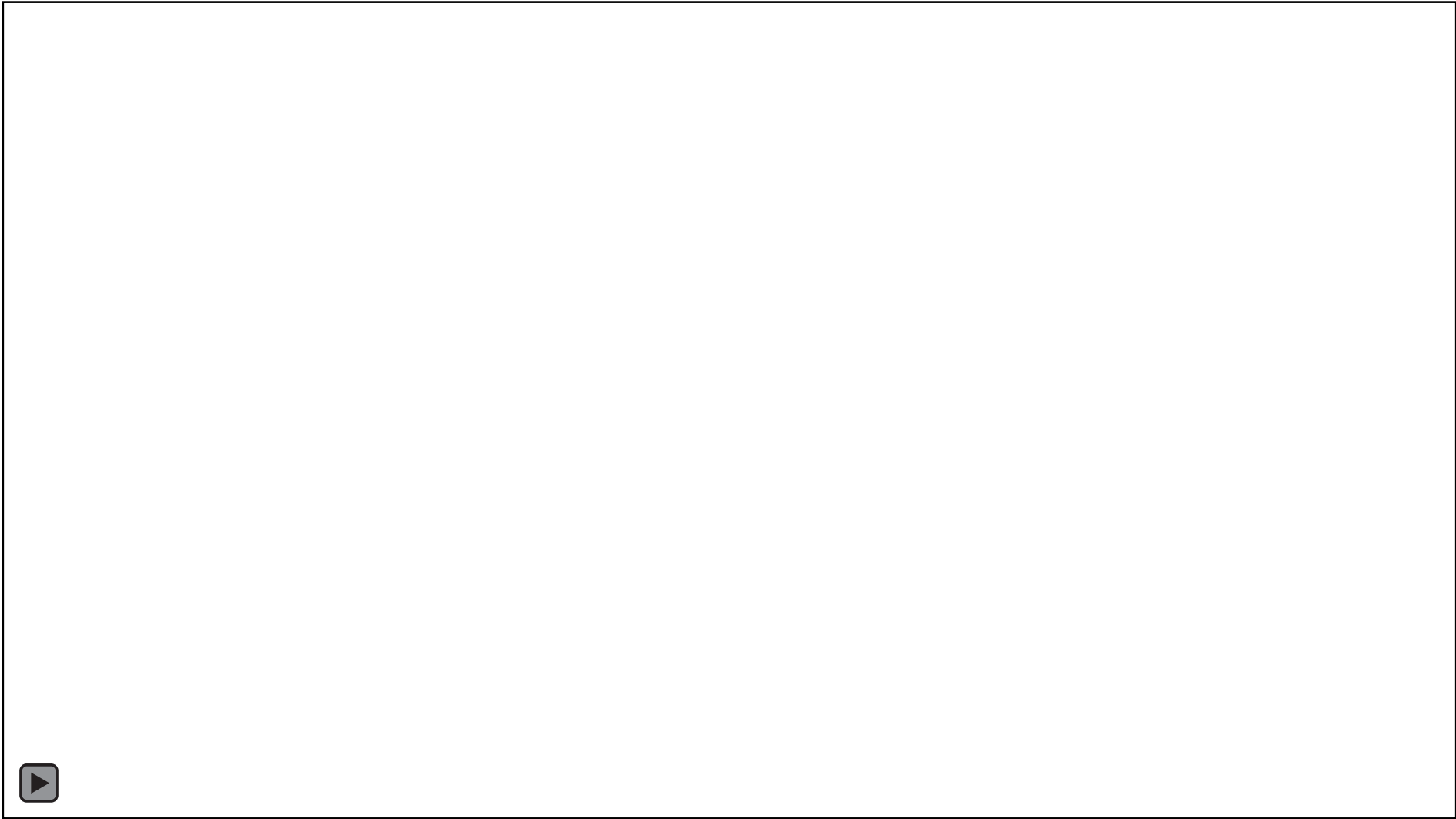
*"You can't just come into our region with an off-the-shelf engagement process and think it will work!"*

*"These targets are being driven by metropolitan values!"*

*"The government has completely imposed on us. It's all impact and no benefit."*

*"The whole fabric of communities are being broken down. [Renewables] will tear apart rural Australia."*



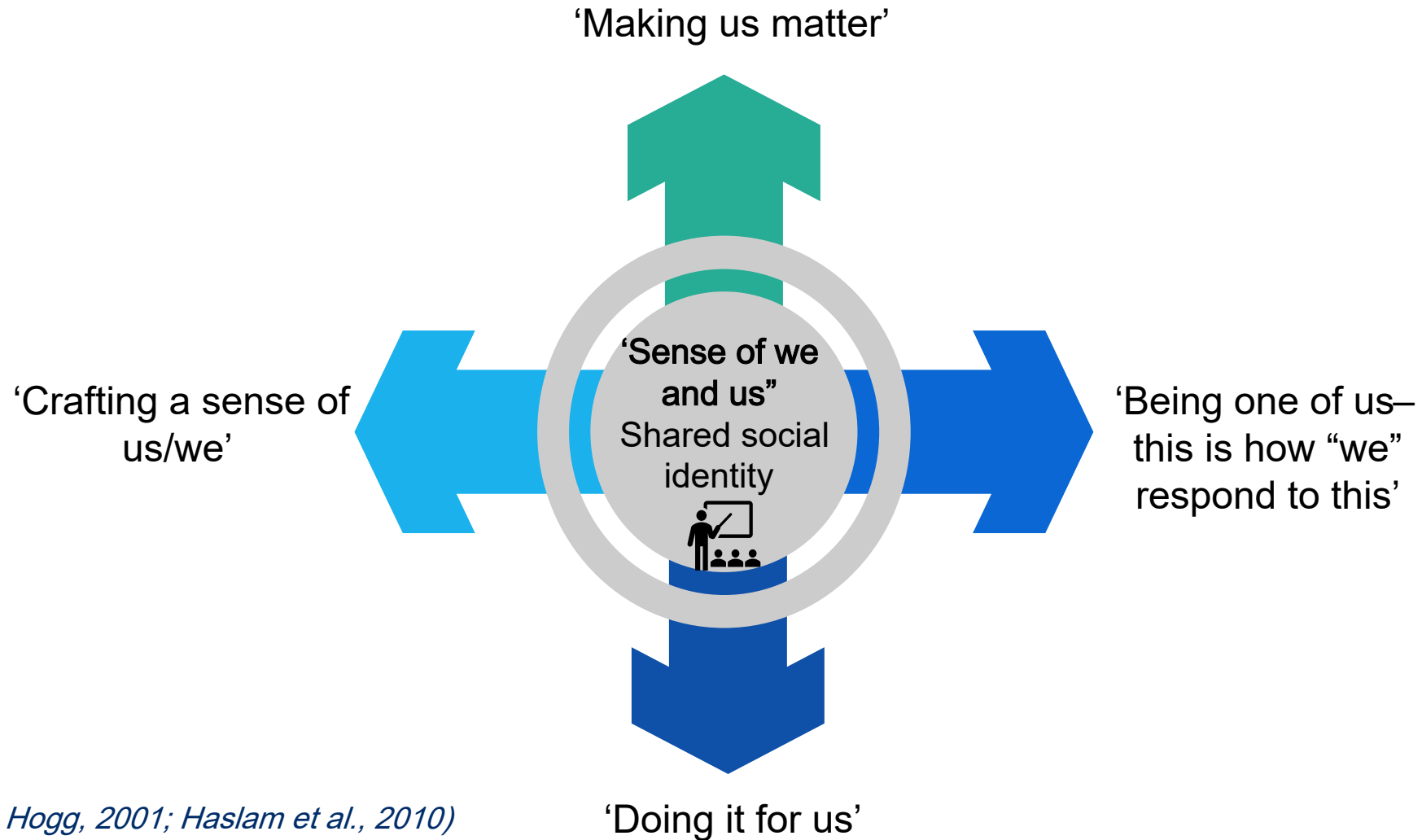


**“We might invariably look after ‘our own’ but who we define as ‘our own’ is highly variable. And, correspondingly, the key task in building solidarity is the task of building strong and inclusive social identities.”**



- Prof. Stephen Reicher

# The Importance of Group Leaders



*(Tajfel, 1979; Hogg, 2001; Haslam et al., 2010)*



### 3 Perceived Loss of Control & Agency Heightens Resistance

Individual experiences a threat to control or agency

Experience a sense of defeat/deflation

*"They've been wearing us down trying to get us to sign these agreements. They tell us, 'we have 10 lawyers just waiting to take you on'. How can we compete against an international corporation?"*

- Landholder, Host (Wind)

Fight or Reject

*"I'm not backing down. They can't just pressure us into submission. It's not right that [developers] think they can do whatever they want to regional Australia."*

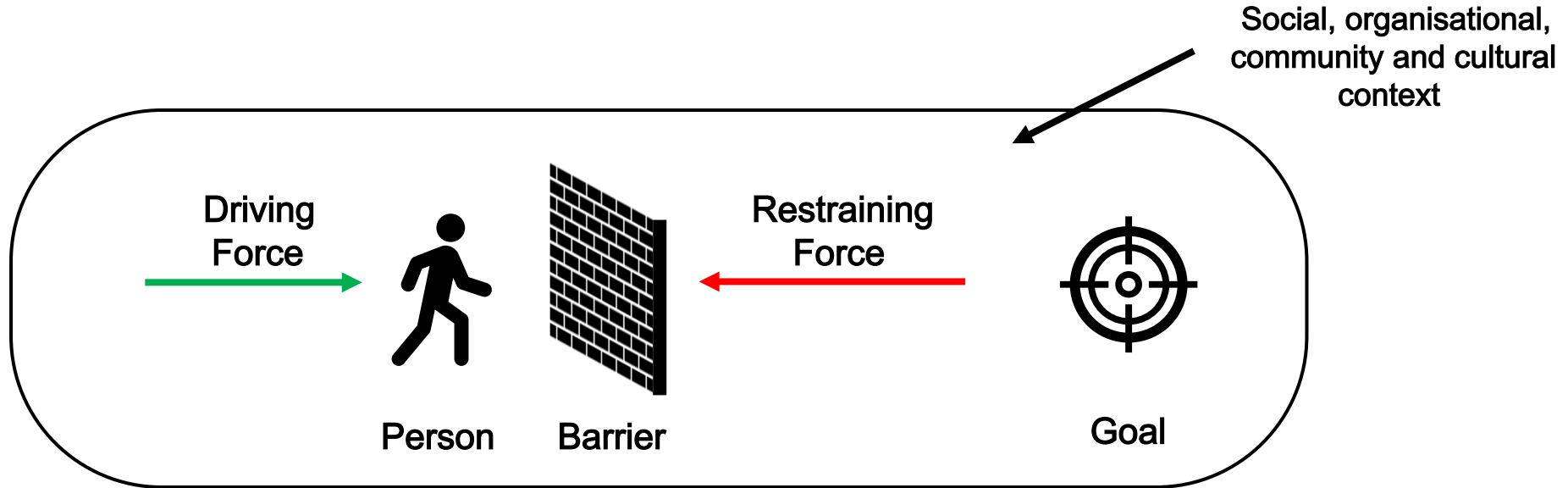
- Landholder, Prospective Host (Solar & BESS)

Accept & Adapt

*"The way I see it, these [renewable energy] developments have been progress for the community. There will always be some people who can't accept that change is coming."*

- Landholder, Host (Solar & BESS)

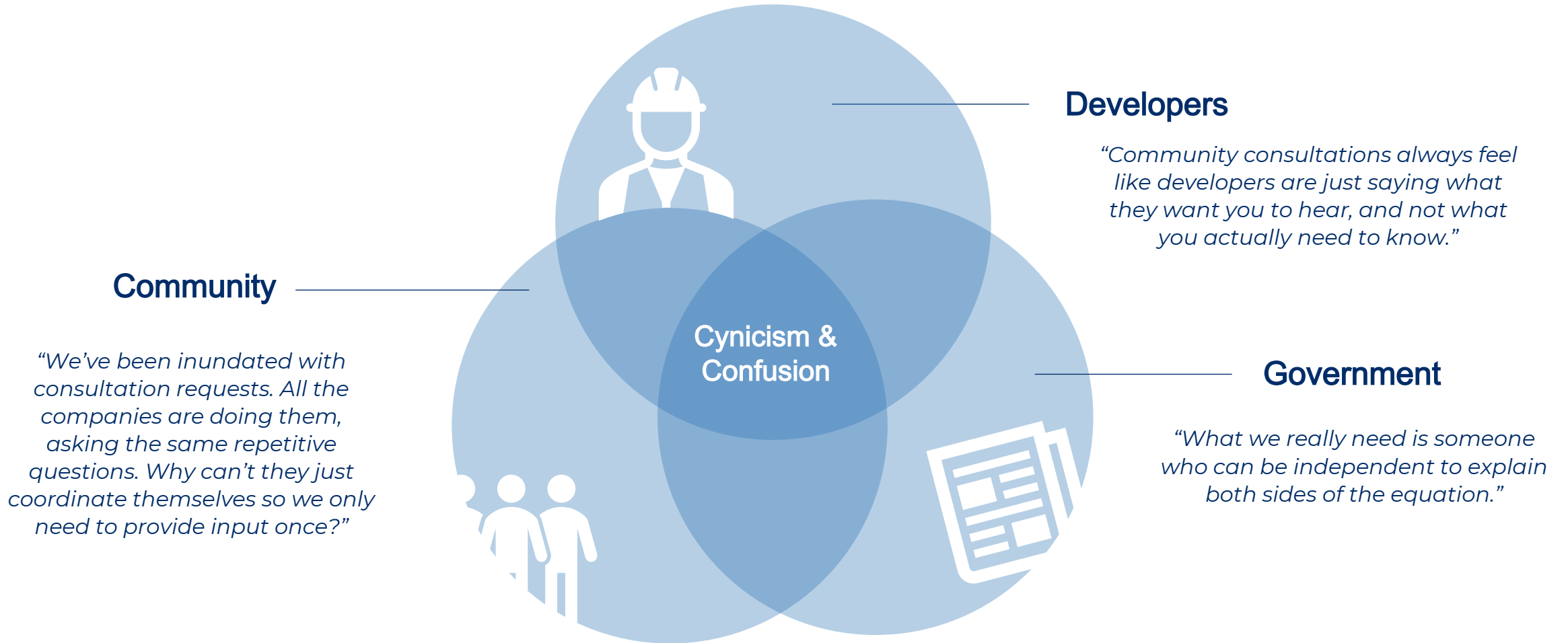
## 4 Over-reliance on benefits (over barriers) undermines trust



*“We’re sick of having people come and try and sell us on the upside without listening to our concerns and taking them on board.”*

*“Why do we have to cop it so people in the city can turn on their air-con?”*

## 5 Lack of Coordination Creates Scepticism and Confusion



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

# Ideas for overcoming resistance

# Some ideas for overcoming resistance



## Identify and enable local messengers

Embed messaging within existing local channels (i.e., community groups, leaders).



## Help communities coordinate

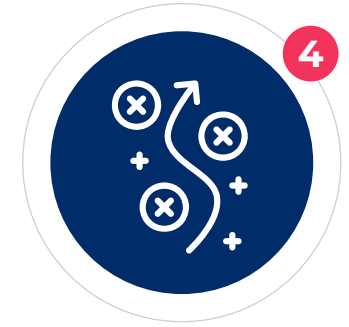
Support communities respond to consultation, understand their options, weigh trade-offs, and make informed decisions.



## Systematically understand and address barriers

Methodically understand 'restraining forces' and how they apply across a community.

Avoid the trap of over-reliance on benefits.



## Embed local action through intermediaries

Leverage local and/or independent groups to be a visible and trusted source of community understanding and navigational support.

Proponents to consider how best to work with, and refer people to, such groups for independent advice.

Evidn.

Thank You



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