

Penny Sharpe

Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy
Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

**Tara Moriarty**

Minister for Agriculture
Minister for Regional New South Wales
Minister for Western New South Wales

Media Release

\$60 million in community benefits start flowing to the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

Friday, 11 April 2025

Footage, interviews and photographs available: <https://bit.ly/3YnRaQw>

The Minns Labor Government is delivering \$60 million to communities across the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), marking the first downpayment on legacy-building local projects ahead of major construction.

The grants are for 54 local projects that will deliver infrastructure, housing and a wide range of community projects with lasting benefits for residents in the REZ.

These projects will see upgrades to key worker housing, critical water infrastructure, training programs, preschools, health services and more. They will boost sport and cultural events and tourism, and upgrade halls and sports grounds that communities use to come together.

The NSW Government is delivering this investment now to ensure communities including Dubbo, Dunedoo, Gilgandra, Gulgong, Mudgee and Wellington see the benefits from the REZ in their region before major construction starts.

The grants include \$11.25 million for each of the four Councils hosting the REZ, for legacy infrastructure projects:

- Mid-Western Regional Council will build affordable housing in Mudgee for key workers and complete civil works that pave the way for additional homes.
- Warrumbungle Shire Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council will upgrade critical water infrastructure.
- Dubbo Regional Council will build the Renewable Energy Awareness and Career Training (REACT) Centre which will enable locals to secure renewable energy jobs.

Community groups will use the grants to build or improve local facilities. The dozens of successful projects include:

- Fitting out a new classroom at Dunedoo Pre-School Kindergarten with a Therapy Room and specialised equipment to provide health services, inclusion and early education.
- Upgrading the Community Hall in Leadville, improving the kitchen, stage area, heating and lighting to increase useability and comfort.
- Adding shade sails to each end of Coolah Swimming Pool and providing equipment such as lane ropes to Dunedoo Amateur Swimming Club.
- Helping Dunedoo Sports Club add floodlighting to 2.6 ha of community and sporting space.
- Funding the Woolly Conversations program to promote mental health awareness and suicide prevention in the shearing and wool community.

- Supporting the Dubbo Waratahs Sports Aboriginal Corporation to host the Dubbo Rugby League Knockout Carnival.
- Upgrading facilities at Wellington Showground.

This is the first round of grants under the Minns Labor Government's initial \$128 million Community and Employment Benefit Program which is being delivered as the Central-West Orana REZ is rolled out.

Due to overwhelming community interest and quality applications, we will extend this round and more projects will be announced.

More funding will be made available over years to come from access fees, which will be paid by the owners of renewable energy projects which are connected to the REZ network.

For further information about the grants program visit: <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cebp>.

Minister for Energy, Penny Sharpe said:

"These grants are about making sure regional communities at the heart of the renewable energy transformation share in its benefits. We've been talking with community groups about their priorities and it's wonderful to see a wide variety of projects receive funding.

"Whether it's better facilities, new skills or upgraded infrastructure, these grants will deliver real, lasting improvements for people across the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone."

Minister for Regional NSW, Tara Moriarty said:

"This \$60 million investment is a game-changer for local infrastructure in regional NSW, and the future prosperity of communities which will host the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone.

"These 54 projects – from water infrastructure upgrades to sports gear and community halls – will make a real difference to the people living in these regional communities."

EnergyCo CEO, Hannah McCaughey said:

"I'm thrilled that benefits are flowing back into the community, with new investment in a whole range of things that will benefit locals. This is just the beginning. There's lots more coming and we'll see over time significant funds flowing into the Central-West Orana region."

Dunedoo Pre-School Kindergarten Director, Robyn Croft said:

"The funding we're receiving is instrumental in kitting out a new classroom for local children. We'll use it to purchase necessary furniture, as well as sensory materials and equipment to help with health services from professionals such as occupational and speech therapists."

Coolah Amateur Swimming Club vice president Barb Baker said:

"We're thrilled to receive this grant, which will allow us to install much-needed shade sails for our swimmers. This funding not only enhances the comfort and safety of our community, but also ensures a more enjoyable experience for everyone who visits our pool."

Upper Hunter Shire Council Deputy Mayor, Patrick Ryan said:

"Funding like this doesn't come along very often for a smaller community like Cassilis. It's almost a generational opportunity for a community like ours."

Warrumbungle Shire Council Mayor, Kathryn Rindfleisch said:

"It is fantastic that EnergyCo has now committed to funding going to projects put forward by the community, and is rolling it out in the region hosting renewable energy projects."

Dubbo Regional Council Mayor, Josh Black said:

"It's important that the local community get something in return for hosting renewable energy projects. The REACT Centre is about building skills for the future. Having this kind of education support in Wellington means people don't have to leave town to upskill or retrain. It's a big step towards better social and economic outcomes for Wellington and the region."

Mid-Western Regional Council Mayor, Des Kennedy said:

“The Mid-Western region community is very happy to receive funding from EnergyCo, as we are the major host of the transmission line. The funding will assist our community in addressing impacts from the projects.”

Further information:

Where is the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone?

- The state’s first Renewable Energy Zone is in the Central-West Orana region, centred by Dubbo and Dunedoo. It also takes in Gulgong, Mudgee, Wellington, Gilgandra and other towns.
- It is expected to bring up to \$20 billion in private investment to the region by 2030, and support around 5,000 construction jobs as well as opportunities for local suppliers.
- Transmission lines for the Central-West Orana REZ will travel 240 kilometres, with the easement taking in 0.04 per cent of the total agricultural land in the four impacted local government areas.
- Major construction starts mid-year.

What is a Renewable Energy Zone?

- Renewable Energy Zones will group new wind and solar power generation into locations where it can be efficiently stored and transmitted across NSW. Five zones have been identified and will keep NSW electricity reliable as coal-fired power stations retire, delivering large amounts of new energy to power our regions and cities.
- REZs will help deliver lower wholesale electricity costs and place downward pressure on customer bills through increased competition, while supporting local jobs and business opportunities during construction and operation.

Note for editors: Footage, interviews and photographs available: <https://bit.ly/3YnRaQw>

Dropbox contains media content for the following projects:

- *Dunedoo Pre-School Kindergarten – interviews, b-roll, photos*
- *Leadville Community Hall – b-roll of a tour of the hall, photos*
- *Coolah Swimming Pool – drone footage*
- *REACT Centre Training Facility – interviews, drone vision of Wellington*
- *Cassilis Sewerage Treatment Plant – interviews, drone footage of plant*
- *Dunedoo Sewage Treatment Plant – interviews, drone footage of plant*
- *Mudgee worker accommodation – drone vision and photos of location, vision of Mudgee*

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