



**ENGAGED
OUTCOMES**

emPOWER Ep01 - Andrew Dyer

[00:00:00] **Wendy:** Hello everyone. I'm here with Andrew Dyer today and we are going to be exploring two things, his insights and perspectives from his recently published community engagement review report and what he thinks better practice engagement looks like on the ground.

[00:00:18] I'd like to start by acknowledging that I'm coming to you today from the land of the Turrbal and Jagera people, and acknowledge the traditional owners from country throughout Australia.

[00:00:28] I pay my respects to them, their cultures, and to Elders past and present. I'd also like to give a really big shout out to our supporters for this episode, the Energy Charter. They champion better practice engagement nationally, and they have some great resources that really should be in your kit bag, so make sure you head there, but only straight after you've finished listening to this fabulous episode, because they're all on their website, I'm sure most of you will know who Andrew is, so he probably doesn't need that much introducing, he's a highly respected and influential energy sector expert, a professorial fellow at Monash University, and has an extensive board portfolio across a really broad range of sectors.

[00:01:11] But most of you on the call today would know him from his nine years tenure as the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner.

[00:01:20] You are listening to Empower, the show empowering people to engage respectfully and effectively in regional communities during the energy transition. I'm your host, Wendy Agar. Welcome to the show.

[00:01:38] We are truly delighted to welcome you to the show today, Andrew. I am really so excited that you can join us for our kickoff episode. As anyone who knows me knows I am always quoting your work. So it seemed really fitting that our Empower podcast that focuses on empowering people to engage respectfully and effectively in regional Australia should actually start with you as our first guest – because it was your report that provided the evidence that back to what regional communities had been telling us for ages that we need to do better.

[00:02:13] Welcome, Andrew.



[00:02:15] **Andrew:** Thanks, Wendy that's a very kind introduction and it is a pleasure to be here.

[00:02:19] **Wendy:** So let's kick off by talking about the AEIC community engagement report, Andrew. I wonder if you could give a brief summary of how it came about to provide some context for those listeners who may not have actually read it yet

[00:02:36] **Andrew:** In short, there was concern, particularly at the federal government level, at the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the engagement practices that accompany the rollout of the energy transition – to the extent that some reactions were so strong that there were impacts delaying or inhibiting the rollout of the energy transition. The federal government wanted to get an independent view of what was going on, what's good and not so good, and the pathway forward.

[00:03:05] So in, I think July of last year, July 4th, to be precise, the federal minister commissioned me to lead the review, known as the Community Engagement Review.

[00:03:17] **Wendy:** So, from that review, I know that you did extensive consultation, and I'm sure you'll fill us in a little bit on that. You came up with nine recommendations. While we probably don't have time to tease them all out, I'm really keen for us to understand the key insights that you got from that research and your really deep engagement.

[00:03:39] **Andrew:** Probably, the fundamental thing that came home to me doing the review, meeting with people and, and you're quite right – we spent an enormous amount of time out in regional Australia, talking to the folks on the ground, but the “ah-ha” insight, which may sound very simple when I say it, is that if we could figure out and fix up every community engagement practice and activity around the countryside, you couldn't do it. You'd never get there and you'd be doing a lot of work that was redundant. So the big insight of the review, to me, was the fact that developers are pursuing projects that probably aren't needed or are not going to happen or even be approved. So, really, the best way to fix poor community engagement is to stop doing it and only do it where you need to do it on the prescribed projects that we need to build to transition away from coal and meet our longer-term targets and net zero and the like.

[00:04:39] **Wendy:** So, essentially you're saying we should reduce that consultation to only projects that are going ahead from the process of developing this review, did you come up with any guidance or key pointers or insights around that?

[00:04:56] **Andrew:** Firstly, it would work better if state governments, in particular, took control over the site selection and the process to develop that site into a power station and



all the accompanying transmission lines that would go through that jurisdiction or geography. So firstly, state governments need to step up and take control of the process.

[00:05:16] If you look at the history of this country, and where our power systems worked well – some would argue that they didn't always work well – but largely they worked well because the state governments had taken the time to lay out a long-term plan and build to it.

[00:05:31] So, we need a plan for where we need the power stations, what power stations do we need, what type, what size, where it will connect to the grid. Is the grid existing or are we hoping that the grid will be built and figure out all those details? And then, from that, distill the plan for what size of grid would be best to accommodate the assets that are required to be built. Part of your question there relates to what's the criteria. And the criteria would include impact on neighbors. If it's a highly dense area of lifestyle property owners, you are going to be in for a much harder time than if you're out in the Mallee or the big wide-open spaces of Western Australia. So, getting the site right in terms of neighbor impacts, access to work resources, the roads, the impact on high value agricultural land, impact on environmental factors et cetera, et cetera. So, you look through that list, you assess the sites up front and then hopefully you pick good sites, rather than not so good sites.

[00:06:38] **Wendy:** So you started to explore your recommendations, and I know you told me that they all fitted together a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle. What are some of the other pieces that, some insights you can share from the jigsaw puzzle as a whole around community engagement and what you learned?

[00:06:55] **Andrew:** Well, one that the press was very excited about was the developer rating scheme.

[00:06:59] Which is a way to rate developers in particular. Developers and contractors on their community engagement and other business metrics, their ability to get the job done. Are they litigious or have good ways of working out disputes. This recommendation stemmed actually from some work we had seen by, in particular, the Queensland Farmers Federation, which has a new landholders toolkit guide for landholders being approached for renewable projects. And down the back of the guide there are a hundred plus questions provided to landholders to ask the proponent before they let them in the door.

[00:07:45] Now that's good. But we felt there are two things. One, it's a big burden on the landholder to ask all those questions and are they getting accurate answers? How can they prove or disprove the answers they're getting?



[00:07:57] And the time that it would take to go through that survey and secondly, as we talked about earlier, we don't really want to put landholders in that position anyway – if we can have sensible site selection by state government. So, the rating system does help in the short term for those landholders that will get direct approaches from developers – in terms of selecting who they should talk to or who not to talk to. It will also help industry to have an external benchmark on their performance.

[00:08:30] And, the rising tide lifts all the boats – that will hopefully encourage ongoing, continuous improvement by the larger developers in and around town.

[00:08:42] **Wendy:** So, there's certainly a lot of talk about the rating scheme and Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) will be delighted that you've mentioned them. Because that guide certainly is a foundational piece of information that's shared a lot. We hear, certainly from the landholders in Queensland, about being approached by six or seven different proponents and that's not unusual.

[00:09:06] Exactly as you've said, who do we choose? And landholders don't have full-time jobs negotiating with these people, so, it certainly sounds like it's much needed and it'll be interesting to see where it ends up from that being your original intent. So, I know that you've championed support for boots on the ground, people doing engagement, Andrew, and this includes being instrumental in setting up the initial innovative TasNetworks landholder training, which of course has morphed into The Energy Charter, continuing this work as the very successful landholder engagement training. What's really stood out to you over time as the key skills and behaviors that are needed for successful engagement in regional communities.

[00:09:55] **Andrew:** Firstly, it's a willingness and a passion to want to do the job of being a land liaison officer. It can be a tough job, not everyone is going to greet you with the red carpet when you get out of your Land Cruiser to convince them to serve you tea and scones.

[00:10:09] You do need to have a toolkit of interpersonal skills and how to plan for meetings, execute meetings, handle objections, follow up, and the like, and of course the program that you mentioned, or both programs, the inaugural one and the one that the Energy Charter has now taken forward, do a lot of work on those areas.

[00:10:30] I like to use the analogy of a professional golfer.....

who has to go out onto the practice fairway and hit hundreds of balls everyday day – probably seven days a week – and you've got to practice. The landholder liaison role is a professional role. You need to practice the role and be passionate about it. We get down to



some of the details of how you make appointments. If there's one thing I'll stress, it's doing the research before you get to the meeting. In the good old days, you'd have to look up Microfiche or call the company secretary to get an annual report.

[00:11:08] **Wendy:** All the young ones or the caller going, what? They're all Googling that right now. Microfiche, that's what it is.

[00:11:15] **Andrew:** Yes, and there were no mobile phones. But today, you know, on the way to the meeting, if you are cutting it fine, you can do your research on Google, whatever tools you might use. You can look up titles, you can look up the company structures, who owns what – all that stuff's pretty important because you need to ultimately do an agreement with a landholder who will be the landowner in most cases, not all, but most cases. So if you don't know who the owner actually is, and you're having a good old time with grandma – but it's actually grandma's ex-husband who owns the lot. So, do your research. There'll be family histories, there'll be people that have really good relationships with their neighbors, and people that don't. The more you get assimilated in that politics, for lack of a better word, then you can plan your approach and where you go to from there a lot better.

[00:12:12] **Wendy:** So, I've heard you talk about relationships, building relationships and doing your research and understanding the local context. And, I love your professional golfer analogy. It takes practice and you've got to be passionate. If we think about doing your research, do you think in local communities there's some sort of gold standard organizations or places that land agents or community engagement people or developers should be going up front when they first go into communities?

[00:12:45] Look, the first point I'll make is, and this sounds very simple, but it's not.....

[00:12:49] **Andrew:** That if you're going to be effective at community engagement, which is the whole topic of the review.....

[00:12:56] You need to **engage** the community. Now, what that means is you don't talk to them or talk at them all the time. You don't prescribe a local benefit program and just throw it out there to the masses. You actually invite and genuinely and sincerely invite the community to be part of the design program, the problem-solving activities. And then two things will happen, they'll figure things that you'll never think of because they're taking it from their, it's their lens and their lens is the important lens to look through on this stuff.

[00:13:29] And secondly, it'll save you a lot of time. And, they'll buy in and adopt what you're putting out there because they actually have skin in the game.



[00:13:38] **Wendy:** So many gems. My note taking is running a bit behind you, so I know it's simple to say, but as you just said, it's not so simple to do and that's quite the gem that when you're engaging, you actually do have to engage. And it's certainly something that I hear regularly from people in communities is the frustration of, if you're coming in to [00:14:00] inform us, tell us and inform. Don't pretend that you're consulting. Nothing makes them angrier.

[00:14:06] So, thank you Andrew for generously sharing your wisdom, experiences, and perspectives today. I've truly taken so much out of it and I've got tons of notes, so I'm sure the people listening on the episode will as well. What would be the one key takeaway that you would like people to leave this episode with, Andrew?

[00:14:27] **Andrew:** Read the report. It's a goodie and I think the key to it all is we need to get back to the basics of good grid and generation planning in an integrated way, not the more disparate way we're doing it at the moment. Down here in Victoria, we tend to talk about the metro tunnel, that's the train tunnel running up Swanston Street.....

[00:14:51] **Andrew:** the street in the middle of the CBD in Melbourne. And its ongoing saga of getting built. You wouldn't have the train line or tunnel route team and the station team not working together or part of the one show. Otherwise, you'll put the station in the worst place to connect to another station, which is what will have to happen when the tunnel opens up. Want to have that integrated. So, so read the report, integrate generation with the grid and pick the best sites to carry out and implement the work.

[00:15:28] **Wendy:** Fantastic. So, we want people to read the report. Now I'm going to ask for one last takeaway. What do you think is the one key thing for people engaging in regional Australia during the energy transition?

[00:15:39] What do you reckon is your number one thing that they should be thinking about?

[00:15:45] **Andrew:** Oh, it is catered for in the report here. Its Theme Five, largely. But, it's the public comms. It's explaining why we are doing this thing and particularly if the benefit for why we doing this thing is not obvious or not a deliverable to the local community that may be impacted.

[00:16:05] You need a good reason for doing it, a good story, and you need to explain the story and work with the community issues that will arise, there'll always be something, and then you move on. Very short answer to your supplementary question there, is people will value certainty over uncertainty. So, if you've got 40 developers knocking on doors trying to



develop projects, zone or corridor or a proposed transmission line, whereas in reality you might have four projects that survive and succeed. Then, you lay that out upfront and give people certainty they'll be built. Therefore, that we'll either not be impacted at all, or that we'll definitely be impacted. But, at least you can explain the certainty.

[00:16:52] So again, in Victoria here where we did the Level Crossing Removal Program, which has worked very well – where it's implemented. The only decision is – do you go above ground or below ground to get through that road intersection. And once you explain which one you're doing, at least people know what they're in for and they can decide what actions they're taking if any, and go from there.

[00:17:15] **Wendy:** Thank you. And each state, I'm sitting here thinking about that in relation to. You've talked a lot about good planning and coordination, and each state certainly has a different way of doing that. Maybe that's another conversation. Andrew, it has been an absolute pleasure having you on the show today, and I feel really honored that we've been able to take some of your time to be our inaugural guest.

[00:17:40] I'm sure that you've really empowered our listeners today. They're going to run off and read your report and hopefully take some actions that result in more respectful and effective engagement when they're working in our regional communities. Thank you, Andrew.

[00:17:55] **Andrew:** Thanks, Wendy. It's been quite a pleasure. Thanks for the chat.

[00:18:01] **Wendy:** Thank you for tuning into EmPOWER. We hope you're leaving this episode with new practical skills, firsthand knowledge and insights. We are passionate about empowering people and building capability to improve engagement outcomes in regional communities. And this episode is one small piece of this. Stay connected. Keep the conversation going, and subscribe to this show on your preferred podcast app. Thank you.

