



# **Inclusive Prosperity Equitable Access to Electrification**

**2025**



## **McKell WA's Inclusive Prosperity Series**

The Western Australian government has made an ambitious commitment to transform our economy. McKell WA's Inclusive Prosperity series aims to be a vital conversation about how Western Australia can shape change for the benefit of all people, invest ambitiously in the future, and, crucially, ensure no one is left behind.

**Event 1: Energy and Electrification with Hon. Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA, Minister for Energy and Decarbonisation, Training, Skills, TAFE and the Pilbara.**

Ensuring equitable access to the benefits of electrification in our communities and regions, how it can drive secure, well-paid jobs and empower local businesses.

Thank you to Tactica Advisory for sponsoring the event.

# The Minister's Speech

Minister Sanderson's speech positioned the energy transition as a challenge that must simultaneously address cost of living pressures and climate action, ensuring the prosperity generated is shared by all communities.

**“We're going to have to work community by community to ensure that those needs are met in the most appropriate way”**

## **Climate Commitments and The Justification for Coal Exit**

The Minister reaffirmed the state's ambitious climate goals: to reach net zero by 2050 and to exit coal in the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) by 2030. This decision is driven not only by the principle of decarbonisation but also by economic realities.

**“Our 2030 timeline is ambitious and it's exiting coal faster than any other state or territory”**

## **Financial Support and Equity in Technology Access**

The government has introduced major funding to assist households with the transition including WA Residential Battery Rebate and No Interest Loans for Low-Income Households.

## **Energy Literacy to manage your own consumption and demand**

- The Switch your Thinking initiative delivers energy efficiency education resources through local government areas across the state.
- The Energy Ahead program is a \$13 million initiative partnership with NGOs to perform energy assessments for vulnerable households, saving up to \$400 on bills.

## **Social Housing**

Social housing upgrades focused on the northwest of the state (regional and remote communities) to upgrade 4,000 social housing dwellings with matched funding from the Commonwealth.

## **The Just Transition in Collie**

A core focus is the commitment to a Just Transition for the community of Collie, which has powered the state for 100 years.

- The government has invested ~\$600 million in new industries to diversify the town's economy, including green steel.
- Approximately 1,300 workers will need to transition into new roles in the next four to five years, requiring significant government support through skills and training.

## **Pilbara and First Nations Economic Benefit**

The Pilbara is a key region for making a difference in electrification.

- Decarbonising Remote Communities: There is a 10-year plan to replace diesel generators with robust renewable energy solutions in remote Indigenous communities, with solutions co-designed with those communities.
- Common-use infrastructure: The state is working on four priority corridors in the Pilbara for the development of new common-use transmission infrastructure in the Pilbara.
- Economic Legacy: A key performance indicator for this work is ensuring Traditional Owners have lasting economic benefits
- The Aboriginal Pilbara Energy Aboriginal working group is funded to negotiate and represent community views.

**“The Pilbara Energy Transition is a really an extraordinary piece of work that is uncharted territory and is attempting to electrify what is the one of the most heavy emitting regions and heavy industry economies in the world and it will become a world leader in how to decarbonise heavy emitting industries”.**

## Panel of experts



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# Highlights of Panel Discussion

The panel continued the discussion on equitable access to electrification, focussing on issues from workforce and wages to housing standards and market structure.

1

## Workforce and Gender Equity in the Transition

Electrification requires an adequate workforce.

- **Workforce Shortfall:** The immediate practical step is to boost the supply of the workforce by investing and supporting people in apprenticeships to increase completion rates and overall numbers.
- **Gender Disparity:** Energy trades are highly gender segregated, with only 4% of tradespeople being women.
- **Workplace Change is Necessary:** The job is going to need to change to attract women, as opposed to women needing to change to fit in. Essential changes include:
  - Implementing flexible working arrangements and better leave provisions (e.g., reproductive health leave).
  - Providing basic provisions like appropriate bathroom facilities and uniforms that fit a woman's body.

2

## Energy Poverty and Housing Standards

Immediate, practical steps to address energy poverty.

- **Social Housing Electrification:** Installing solar and battery systems on all social housing (new and existing). This would significantly increase a resident's disposable income by lowering utility costs without requiring a change to welfare payments
- **Phasing Out Gas:** Move to phase out gas to eliminate the financial burden on low-income households of paying two connection fees.
- **Rental Market Reform:** Raising the minimum standards for landlords in the private rental market to include thermal comfort/cooling and heating standards.
- **Targeted subsidies:** Greater, long-term impact if invested in solar panels or fixing up social housing, rather than universal energy rebates.
- **Consistent Regional Housing Standards:** Currently Government Regional Officer Housing in the Pilbara has mandated thermal cooling and heating standards, but new social housing for the lowest income groups does not.



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## Market Structure, Consumer Agency

Need for reform in market structure and consumer engagement.

- Systemic Market Reform: "Root and branch" rethink of the entire electricity system and frameworks which is still operating on a model designed two decades ago, despite the physical system fundamentally changing.
- Passive Engagement: Asking struggling families to "load shift" (change energy use times) for time-of-use tariffs is incredibly challenging. Technology behind the meter should become responsive and dispatchable to reduce bills without the consumer having to be actively participatory.
- Innovative Solutions for Renters: Innovative models to enable renters to participate, such as plug-and-play solar and battery on the balcony and solar gardens (where renters buy a share and get a deduction on their bill).



## 4

# Adaptation and our Climate Reality

Adaptation should be front and centre

- Implement Universal Workplace Protections Against Extreme Heat: There is an urgent need for universal legal protections against working in extreme heat, particularly for outdoor workers.
- Integrate Climate Reality into Infrastructure Standards (Post Event Review): Opportunities should be seized after severe climate events (bushfires, floods) to fundamentally rethink and change construction standards and infrastructure placement.
  - This involves simple changes, such as considering putting power infrastructure on higher ground if flood risk is known, or reviewing how roads are built to enhance resilience.
- Develop Localised Vulnerability Mapping and Cooling Solutions: Implement practical, local government-led solutions for heatwaves, such as:
  - Establishing a checklist system for checking on vulnerable residents (e.g., seniors).
  - Utilising existing community facilities as official cooling centres and providing free transportation to them during extreme heat events.

# McKell Institute's Research

The McKell Institute has long considered topics as the energy transition, social equity, housing, and workforce in its progressive policy research, which is directly aligned with the key themes debated at this forum.

1

## **How the Sausage is Made Assessing Australian Policymaking Practices in the Energy Sector**

Makes recommendations to improve policymaking practice, and spark understanding and conversation on the quality and importance of good policymaking in Australia.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/how-the-sausage-is-made/>

2

## **Rewarding Renters**

Advocates increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), as a direct way to help those most affected by cost of living pressures.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/rewarding-renters/>

3

## **Achieving the Productivity Promise**

While pursuing policies that drive productivity is critical, it is equally important that policies which help orient more of the gains of productivity to workers themselves be explored.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/achieving-the-productivity-promise/>



4

## **A Closure Framework for Mt Isa**

Sets out a holistic transition framework for Mount Isa's response strategy, informed by best practices from past industry closures. It includes a diversification analysis to reveal industrial opportunities based on occupation and industry employment.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/articles/a-closure-framework-for-mount-isa/>

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## **The Cost of Extreme Weather**

Recommends more of the federal and state government budgets be apportioned to resilience building and future-proofing, moving away from a reactionary model that disproportionately allocates funds into recovery rather than resilience.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/the-cost-of-extreme-weather-1/>

## Further reading

You might be interested in work done by our expert panel and their organisations:

### **Curtin Institute for Energy Transition**

[Decarbonise WA, Decarbonise the World](#)

June 2025

More resources on their website:

<https://research.curtin.edu.au/ciet/>

### **WACOSS**

[Understanding Utility Hardship](#)

December 2022

[Heat Vulnerability Project - Heat Map](#)

### **Unions WA**

[WA Can't Wait](#) - Build a decommissioning hub for our environment, jobs and green energy future

July 2025

### **The Superpower Institute**

[The Pilbara: A Safe Space for Dangerous Ideas?](#)

June 2025



## What's next?

The insights from both the Minister and the panel confirm that the energy transition's success hinges on solving the challenges of equity and workforce. We hope to extend these ideas in our formal policy research.

Our **Inclusive Prosperity Series** will continue over the next 12 months, as we discuss and debate the Government's economic diversification agenda.

At McKell Institute WA, our focus will remain on the people—exploring how these emerging, often complex, industries can not only drive massive economic growth but also ensure the benefits—the jobs, the training, the improved liveability, and the wealth—are shared equitably across our state.

### **McKell Institute WA**

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