



**THE HON CHRIS BOWEN MP**  
**MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY**

MC23-033324

Mr Tim Crosdale  
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Dear Mr Crosdale

Thank you for your correspondence of 31 October 2023 regarding Port Stephens Council's position on the Hunter offshore wind area. I appreciate the time you have taken to bring this matter to my attention.

I declared an area in the Pacific Ocean offshore of the Hunter as suitable for the development of offshore wind on 12 July 2023, following extensive public consultation. After considering feedback from over 1,916 submissions from the community and advice from Commonwealth, New South Wales and local government agencies, I declared a smaller area than I originally proposed. The smaller area balanced the views of local community, local industries and marine users. As requested by Port Stephens Council in their submission into the public consultation process, I moved the area to be at least 20 km offshore from Port Stephens.

I have issued an invitation for developers to apply for feasibility licences to undertake research and further studies to inform potential projects in the Hunter declared area, which closed for applications on 14 November 2023. The Offshore Infrastructure Registrar is now assessing each application against the merit criteria set out in the *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021* and Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Regulations 2022. This allows consideration of the technical and financial capabilities of the developer, the viability of a proposed project, the suitability of the developer, and whether a project is in the national interest, including the impact on, and contribution to, the Australian economy and local communities. Only projects that meet all the merit criteria will be considered for a licence.

During the feasibility licence stage, developers will work with the community and other marine users, such as the commercial and recreational fishing industry, to refine their project proposals to ensure existing users can continue to use Australia's oceans, sharing the space with this new industry. It is also in this feasibility stage that specific project details, such as the number of turbines, will be set out.

Developers of offshore wind projects must undertake extensive environmental assessments and obtain approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Project proposals that have unacceptable environmental impacts will not be able to proceed to construction. Experts within the Nature Positive Regulations Division of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water review these assessments. Where the department and Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, are not satisfied that the studies submitted are adequate or do not demonstrate that a project will be able to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts to an acceptable level, approval under the EPBC Act will not be provided and a project will be unable to proceed.

I thank you for your engagement in the consultation process to date, staff from the department met with Port Stephens Council staff on 3 April 2023 during the public consultation period on the proposed Hunter offshore wind area to discuss the proposal, and more recently with you on 30 October 2023.

I would be happy to meet with Port Stephens Council to discuss the declared area and next steps for offshore wind in the region. I understand your council is already in contact with my office to organise an appropriate time.

Thank you again for raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bowen', with a horizontal line at the end.

CHRIS BOWEN