

A Spectrum of Possibilities: An Eco-Social Analysis of Renewable Energy Transformation in Regional Australia

By Alana West
BGlobSt, BA (Hons)

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Under the supervision of Dr Jonathan Marshall
and Dr Jeremy Walker

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Alana West, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.


This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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I submit this work for examination in the format of a conventional thesis.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that Chapter 6 contains the name and words of a person who has died.

'The democratic machineries that emerged to govern the age of carbon energy seem to be unable to address the processes that may end it'

Timothy Mitchell, Carbon Democracy 2009, p.399

'The impasse demands new imaginaries'

Sheena Wilson, Feminist and Decolonial Futures 2018, p.385

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List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACON	AIDS Council of New South Wales
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
ARENA	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
BP	Beyond Petroleum (formerly British Petroleum)
CBSI	community benefit sharing initiatives
CCAG	Caroon Coal Action Group
CRG	community reference groups
CSG	coal seam gas
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
EIS	environmental impact statement
FANG	Feminist Anti-Nuclear Group
FoE	Friends of the Earth
GHG	greenhouse gas
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JSNWL	Jessie Street National Women's Library
LCSI	Lismore Community Solar Initiative
LNG	liquid natural gas
MCCC	Maules Creek Community Council
NE	New England
NESF	New England Solar Farm
NR	Northern Rivers
REMP	Renewable Energy Masterplan
RET	renewable energy target
REZ	renewable energy zone
SSD	state significant development

STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UPC	UPC Renewables
WECAN	Women's Earth and Climate Network
WEP	Walcha Energy Project
WAAGV	Women's Action Against Global Violence
WANE	Women Against Nuclear Energy
WAPC	Women Against Pit Closures



Abstract

The climate crisis necessitates the (now) rapid decarbonisation of global industries and societies. With fossil fuels as the core culprit of carbon emissions, their renewable energy counterparts such as solar, wind and wave energy are vital to the decarbonisation project. The eco-social relations driving transformation of our energy system from fossil fuels to renewable energy can be understood along a spectrum of possibilities. These possibilities range from green capitalist, ecomodernist techno-utopias to Indigenous, ecofeminist (re)commoning futures, and many other possibilities in between. This thesis situates these possibilities within nascent transitions to renewable energy in the rural regions of New England and the Northern Rivers in New South Wales, Australia. Through a multi-sited ethnographic exploration of centralised, corporate renewable energy projects and decentralised, community projects, this thesis examines the possibilities articulated, futures envisioned and challenges encountered by different models of energy transitions. Drawing predominantly on Marxist theories of alienation and materialist ecofeminist theories of de-alienation, this thesis argues that our eco-social relations must also be transformed alongside our energy system if we are to address humanity's alienation from nature, and from one another, that has led us to the climate crisis.