A Spectrum of Possibilities:

An Eco-Social Analysis of Renewable Energy Transformation in Regional Australia

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

Under the supervision of Dr Jonathan Marshall and Dr Jeremy Walker

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Alana West, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

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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

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

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

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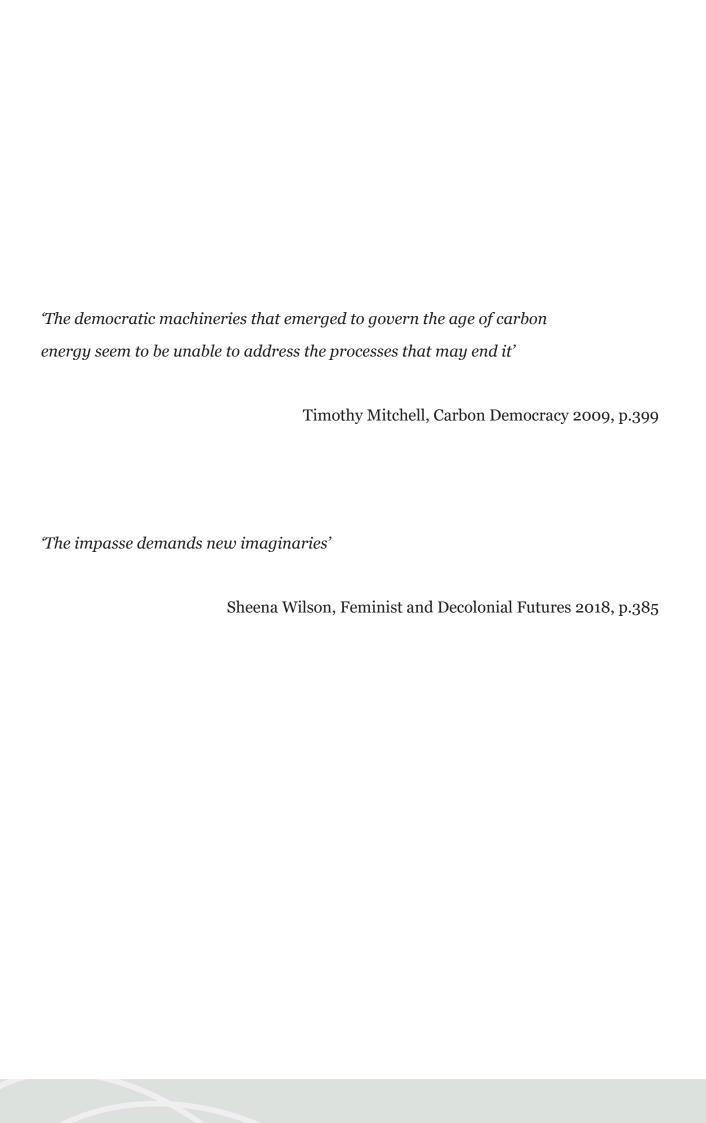
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Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that Chapter 6 contains the name and words of a person who has died.



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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 Caroona 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 lead us to the climate crisis.