

Climate Council: Bush can boom in climate fight



A NEW rural-focused Climate Council report says there are big bucks to be made by rural communities who tackle climate change.

On the Frontline: Climate Change & Rural Communities says the regions are ripe for renewable energy investment, predicting that 28,000 new jobs would be created if Australia's share of renewable electricity was upped to 50 per cent by 2030.

But the report also says increasingly harsh weather conditions could widen the gap between city and bush, with more people leaving the regions for the big smoke, and existing social challenges wilting under increased temperatures.

Climate Council professor and report co-author Lesley Hughes said investment in renewable energy could go a long way to addressing these challenges and help "attract jobs and investment back to communities."

The report said the sparse population and ample renewable energy sources in rural areas was an ideal draw-card for large-scale projects that could add to the \$1-to-\$2 billion rural renewable energy investment (40 per cent of the nation's total) seen every year.

"Constructing, operating and maintaining utility scale power such as wind farms and solar power plants offers opportunities to increase employment in regional, rural and remote areas," the report read.

"Unlike other industrial transitions (such as car manufacturing where jobs have been lost offshore), increasing Australia's renewable electricity supply creates jobs locally in Australia.

"In addition to local investment ... large-scale renewable energy projects pay annual rates to rural shire councils and establish community benefit funds."

On the Frontline also found:

- Climate change threatens to exacerbate the urban migration trend
- Climate change is reducing water availability in areas of the Murray-Darling Basin
- Farmers are adding additional revenue streams to their properties from renewable energy. About \$20.6 million is paid annually in lease payments to farmers and landholders hosting wind turbines.
- Renewable energy can reduce electricity costs for rural and remote communities, who traditionally pay much higher prices than their urban counterparts.
- Many ag industries have made changes to the way they operate to counter climate change - but there is a limit to how much farmers can adapt – and it can be expensive and difficult

Report co-author Dr Lauren Rickards said the risks posed by climate change threatened exacerbate many of the challenges already faced by those in regional areas.

“In addition to affecting agricultural production, climate change affects rural communities in many far-reaching ways, increasing the cost of essential goods and services, devaluing community assets and degrading places we love,” Dr Rickards said.

Climate Council chief councillor Tim Flannery said strong climate action was required to protect those living rural and regional areas from worsening impacts.

“The new projects in renewable power provides enormous opportunities for new income streams and real prospects for energy self-sufficiency, particularly for those in the bush,” Professor Flannery said.

“People in the bush look after themselves and each other and they’re already getting on with the job in adapting farming practices and implementing solutions for climate change.

“Now it’s time for our political leaders to match their effort and take the action we need to tackle climate change.”