2025

GIPPSLAND NEW ENERGY CONFERENCE REPORT

Gippsland New Energy CONFERENCE 2025

Presented by:
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GCCN
GIPPSLAND CLIMATE CHANGE NETWORK

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OVERVIEW

The Gippsland New Energy Conference (GNEC25) continued to strengthen its reputation as Australia's leading regional forum for renewable energy collaboration, innovation, and community engagement.This year's event was greatly enriched through partnerships with the APAC Global Wind Conference and the Clean Energy Council, which brought new expertise to the program and expanded GNEC's reach well beyond Gippsland.

We extend our sincere thanks to our outstanding keynote speakers from the Net Zero Authority, Grattan Institute, International Geothermal Association, UK Catapult Project, Superpower Institute, and other global organisations, whose insights and leadership elevated the quality and ambition of this year's discussions.

GNEC25 also expanded its program with the addition of the ICN Supplier Function, Farm Tours, and the ACOWE Technical Symposium, further highlighting Gippsland's technical capability and its commitment to inclusive, solutions-focused dialogue. Delegates once again described the event as open, friendly, and forward-looking — a reflection of the professionalism, passion, and hospitality that define the Gippsland spirit.

Our gratitude goes to Latrobe City Council for once again being exceptional hosts, and to Regional Development Victoria (RDV) for providing facilitators and event volunteers whose contributions were invaluable. We also acknowledge the collaboration of Offshore Wind Energy Victoria (OWEV), VicGrid, the SEC, AGL, TAFE Gippsland, Federation University, ICN, Melbourne University, and the Gippsland Alliance for Climate Action (GACA), all of whom played key roles in shaping the program and deepening its impact.

Most importantly, we thank the hundreds of community and industry members who offered advice, support, and time — from driving buses and leading panels to greeting delegates and ensuring every detail reflected the welcoming and inclusive nature that has become GNEC's hallmark.

Our appreciation also extends to the dedicated team at Nanoo Nanoo, including Dan and Eloisa, for their exceptional event management, and to our volunteers in teal, as well as our Brianna and our local catering and technical partners, whose professionalism and energy brought the event to life. Together, we have grown GNEC into a truly regional success story — one that showcases Gippsland's capability, creativity, and character on both the national and international stage.

This review reflects our ongoing commitment to learning and continuous improvement. It draws on survey responses, stakeholder feedback, and participant insights to guide the future evolution of the conference. The recommendations that follow will inform our planning for GNEC26, ensuring the event remains dynamic, relevant, and impactful as Gippsland continues its journey at the heart of Australia's clean energy transformation.

We look forward to welcoming you again next year.

Darren McCubbin
CEO – Gippsland Climate Change Network
Conference Coordinator.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATION ONE:
Grow GNEC as Regional Australia's Flagship Energy Conference

a) Continue GNEC in 2026 at the same venue, at a similar time of year.

b)Consolidate and strengthen the Supplier Function, Regional Farm Tours, and ACOWE Technical Symposium as signature components of the GNEC program.

c) Enhance youth participation by developing meaningful pathways for students and young people to engage directly with the main conference.

RECOMMENDATION TWO:
Create a very different Conference Experience

a)**Protect GNEC's Regional Identity and our "Home Advantage"**
- Emphasise that Gippsland is the heart of Australia's energy transition from a tradition of extensive coal fired power to a diverse array of renewable energy projects — using storytelling, local case studies, and visible community participation to keep the event distinctive amid growing competition.
- Involve former coal workers in guided tours and community engagement activities that explain the energy transition from a lived experience, helping to demystify the process and provide a relatable human perspective on change.
- Continue offering affordable ticket options for Gippsland residents, creating opportunities to showcase local businesses, and ensuring strong representation of regional speakers across the conference program.

b) **Elevate and Improve Key Sessions**
- Prioritise main auditorium placement for high-interest panels — such as those featuring offshore wind proponents — to maximise visibility and reinforce Gippsland's leadership narrative in the energy transition.
- Simplify and declutter the program by reducing the number of short sessions, instead focusing on fewer, higher-impact panels that allow ample time for audience questions and discussion.

c) **Diversify the Program**
- Introduce light, social activities — such as karaoke, trivia, or live music — to foster camaraderie and offer enjoyable alternatives to formal sessions.
- Review the pacing of the conference to include more flexible scheduling, additional networking opportunities, bus trips, and interactive elements that contribute to a vibrant and engaging atmosphere.

d) **Enhance Signage to improve venue navigation**
- Develop and display clear venue maps at key entry points and install fingerboard directional signs throughout the precinct to assist delegates in navigating between conference rooms, the expo hall, and outdoor areas.

e) **Address Parking**
- Work with the venue to improve parking access and traffic flow, ensuring clear communication of available parking options in pre-event materials. Monitor progress on the new parking areas scheduled for completion in 2026 and integrate them into future event planning.

RECOMMENDATION THREE:
Evolve and Enrich the GNEC Program

a) **Simplify and streamline the program**
- Reduce overlap between sessions and adopt standardised start/finish times.
- Build in time for questions and discussion to deepen engagement.
- Use colour-coded themes on the agenda for easy navigation

b) **Enhance keynote impact**
- Extend keynote sessions and seek National and International thought leaders. Avoid dates that coincide with Parliamentary sittings to encourage attendance from political and ministerial leaders.
- Consider closing each day with a compelling local or inspirational speaker that is not necessarily energy related.

c) **Improve gender balance**
- Ensure gender balance and diversity across panels and sessions.
- Continue to highlight the **Gippsland Women in Energy Breakfast** as a signature feature of the conference that celebrates inclusion and leadership in the sector.

d) **Expand Self-Directed Content**
- Strengthen the *Energy Exchange* concept for delegate curation.
- Introduce open stages or "lightning sessions" to invite spontaneous delegate participation.

e) **Deepen the Learning Experience**
- Offer site visits and technical tours (e.g., Marinus Link, ports, or OSEW projects) as part of a "GNEC Field Day" or optional third day.
- Include sessions on the Arts for transition, young people's perspective and social impact.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:
Make the Expo Hall the Heart of the Conference

a) **Create a new Expo site and develop a "GNEC Town Square"**
Create an additional expo zone by integrating Rooms 1 and 2, connecting this area with the outdoor stage, seating, and Pavilion to reinforce the concept of a central "Town Square." This expanded space should be offered first to Platinum, Gold, and Silver sponsors, recognising their contribution and need for high visibility.

b) **Develop the main stage.**
Develop a structured "Main Stage Spotlight" program that allows sponsors and key partners to deliver short, high-impact announcements or launches during the conference.

c) **Enhance foot traffic to the existing town hall Expo site**
Enhance signage and visual cues to better promote the existing Town Hall expo area and activate the stage as a "Knowledge Theatre" — hosting short presentations, demonstrations, and speaker sessions. Investigate whether an additional coffee spot could be placed there to encourage foot traffic.

d) **Open the Expo spaces to the Community**
Provide dedicated opportunities for local residents, schools, and youth groups to experience the Expo Hall. This could include guided tours, open sessions, or dedicated "Community Hours" where students and the public can explore exhibits, meet industry representatives, and engage with hands-on energy demonstrations.

e) **Refine Ticketing and Staffing Policies**
Introduce a clear framework for sponsor and exhibitor ticket allocations to balance staffing needs with catering and capacity limits.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE:
Deliver a Sustainable and Efficient Catering Experience

a) **Improve Catering Flow and Accessibility**
- Review catering logistics to reduce queue times, particularly during peak lunch periods.
- Ensure clear food labelling and communication of dietary options for delegates with allergies or restrictions.

b) **Simplify Sustainability Tools**
- Retain reusable cups and utensils but simplify their distribution — removing unnecessary app-based systems.
- Communicate sustainability practices clearly to delegates before and during the event.

c) **Celebrate Sustainable Practices:** Continue the Tree Planting Day as an annual pre-conference tradition, potentially partnering with Committee for Gippsland, local schools or Landcare groups.

d) **Reconnect Conference Catering with Gippsland Producers:** Re-establish a partnership with Food & Fibre Gippsland to showcase local food choices at GNEC26.

RECOMMENDATION SIX:
Improve Digital Tools and Ticketing Efficiency

a) **Review Conference App**
- Assess alternative platforms to Whova that provide better usability, integration, and cost efficiency.
- Consider hybrid solutions—using the app for networking and speaker feedback while offering simplified printed or screen-based agendas.

b) **Streamline Ticketing and Check-In**
- Introduce clearer procedures for delegate substitutions before the event.

c) **Improve Name Badge Management**
- Sort badges alphabetically and colour-code by role (speaker, sponsor, volunteer, etc.) and ample blank cards for on-site changes.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN:
Support and Strengthen Our Volunteer Team

a) **Appoint Coordinators to assist.**
- Create a Volunteer Coordinator to oversee scheduling and communication with volunteers
- A Bus Coordinator to assist front-desk staff with registration and transport logistics.

b) **Introduce "Hospitality Cards":** Allow volunteers priority access to catering, coffee and amenities.

c) **Provide a dedicated volunteer room:** Where team members can rest, refresh, and feel valued between their shifts

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT:
Continue to refine Logistics, Legacy and Accessibility

a) **Deepen Program and Symposium Offerings:** Support the ACOWE Symposium and seek sponsorship for it. Look at adding a technical journal.

b) **Upgrade Technical and Accessibility Features:** Standardise presentation specifications, improve screen visibility in little theatre, and enhance accessibility through thoughtful seating, work areas, and device-charging points.

c) **Boost Post-Event Visibility**

- Ensure sponsors, partners, and speakers have access to shareable photography and video content that highlights key moments and captures the unique atmosphere of the event immediately after the event.
- Develop a coordinated social-media strategy to release highlight videos, delegate messages, and stories immediately following the conference to maintain engagement and momentum.

d) **Introduce Branded Merchandise:** Create sustainable, Gippsland-branded merchandise — such as shirts, hats, and reusable products — to extend the visibility of the conference and promote pride in the region's renewable energy transition.

CONFERENCE TEAM

CONFERENCE COORDINATOR
Darren McCubbin

EVENT MANAGER
Eloisa Tripodi and Dan Clancey (Nanoo Nanoo)

ACOWE TECHNICAL SUMMIT COORDINATION
Alexandra Davis (Melbourne University) with
Alana Auden (Federation University)

YOUTH SUMMIT COORDINATION
Shannon Egan (TAFE Gippsland), Pauline Boulton (South Gippsland Shire) and Ashley Hall (VicGrid)

ICN SUPPLIER FUNCTION
Melissa McCurry (ICN), Marianna Costa (ICN) with Colin Young (ICN)

FARM TOURS
Kaylene Wickham (East Gippsland Shire)

WOMEN IN RENEWABLES BREAKFAST
Stella Bodman (Gippsland Women in Renewables)

PLANTATION DAY
Mandy Neave (DEECA) and the Gippsland Community Leadership Program

FRONT OF HOUSE COORDINATION
Julianne Sargant (DEECA) and Pauline Boulton (South Gippsland Shire)

TECHNOLOGY SUPERVISOR & WEBSITE DESIGN
Carolyn Crossley (GCCN)

SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR
Scott Douglas (GreenLab Futures)

CATERING COORDINATOR
Brianna Tominski (The Benjamin Hospitality Group)

CONFERENCE COMMUNICATIONS
Esther Lloyd (GCCN), Andrea Streckfuss (RDV) and Kate Mills (DEECA)

INCLUSION COORDINATOR
Ben Corcoran (Corcoran Enterprises) and David Roberts

VENUE OPERATIONS
Richelle Rowed (GPAC)

TECHNICAL MANAGER
Brett Tippett (GPAC)

OTHER WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

CONFERENCE CONTROL GROUP

The Organisation team plus Kirsten Power (Wellington Shire), Bodye Darvill (OWEV) Glen McColl, Shay Ferguson (Latrobe City) and Christy Hoiles (Latrobe City), Mandy Neave (GLaWAC), Pauline Boulton (South Gippsland Shire), Elise Erwin (RDV), Rachel Weatherley (Wellington Shire) and Veronica Quinless (TAFE Gippsland).

VOLUNTEERS

Mathias Wood, Antoinette Watson, Deb Kirk, Beverley J Armitage, Dane Jones, Mary Patsatzis, Natarsha Richards, Kushal Jain, Meaghan Blewett, Tony Wolfe, Rob Dimsey, Stephen Angus, Gareth Little Hales, Elena Kalnin, Dan Caffrey, Rowan Lace, Chris Barfoot and Michael Timpano.

WORKING GROUP

Amanda Griffiths – CarbonNet
Amy Dynes – Orsted
Andrew O'Loughlin – Federation University
Annelise Answerth – Gippsland Water
Bill Mundy – Norwep
Chris Francis – SV
Christina Young – SEC
Daniel Cotterill – Mainline Communications
David Hood – DEECA
Elise McQuilten - GHD
Fi Cotter – ngh Consulting
Grace Pundyk – OSEW
Gary Stevens - Iberdrola Australia
Erin Lord - Origin Energy
Holly Williamson – Marinus Link
Honi Walker – SEMMA
Josie Hess – NSFW Productions
Kate Foster – Corio Generation
Lisa Nicholls – SECV
Michelle Anderson – Federation University
Monique De Carli - AGL
Paul Johnson – Star of the South
Peter Killeen – GHD
Renee Kurowski – Iberdrola Australia
Ruth Harper – Latrobe City
Sarah Hogben - RMCG
Sarita Torres – Apprenticeships Victoria
Simon Robert – Solar Victoria
Stephanie Sabrinskas – NSFW Productions
Suzanne Conlan - VicGrid
Tim Peterson – Solar Victoria

OUR SPONSORS

CONFERENCE PARTNER

LATROBE CITY COUNCIL

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL

PLATINUM PARTNER

agl

SEC

GOLD PARTNER

GIPPSLAND SKIES
Harnessing the power of offshore wind together.

STAR OF THE SOUTH

Iberdrola Australia
A Brighter Future

Ørsted

OW
OCEAN WINDS

VicGrid

SILVER PARTNER

ACOWE
Australian Centre for Offshore Wind Energy

AusNet

Blue MACKEREL

Committee for GIPPSLAND

TAFE GIPPSLAND

The Fair Co.

nbn

EnergyAustralia
LIGHT THE WAY

CORCORAN ENTERPRISES

South Gippsland Shire Council

Victoria State Government
Regional Development Australia
GIPPSLAND
An Australian Government Initiative

Solar Victoria

RWE

CLEAN ENERGY COUNCIL

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

MARINUS LINK

Federation University

octopus australia
A brighter way

ICN Victoria

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA

EXPO PARTNER

Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

EXTENT
PEOPLE CENTRED HERITAGE
Brown & May Marine
AUSTRALIA

RACV
COMMERCIAL ENERGY SOLUTIONS

TOUCH PROJECTS

GHD

GWEC
GLOBAL WIND ENERGY COUNCIL

NGH

GQS

Bank Australia

CONFERENCE BY NUMBERS

TOTAL REGISTRATIONS
1020 over three days

WHOVA DOWNLOADS
839 active users

SPEAKERS
244 respected speakers

ACOWE TECHNICAL SYMPOSIUM
148

SUPPLY CHAIN PARTICIPANTS
114

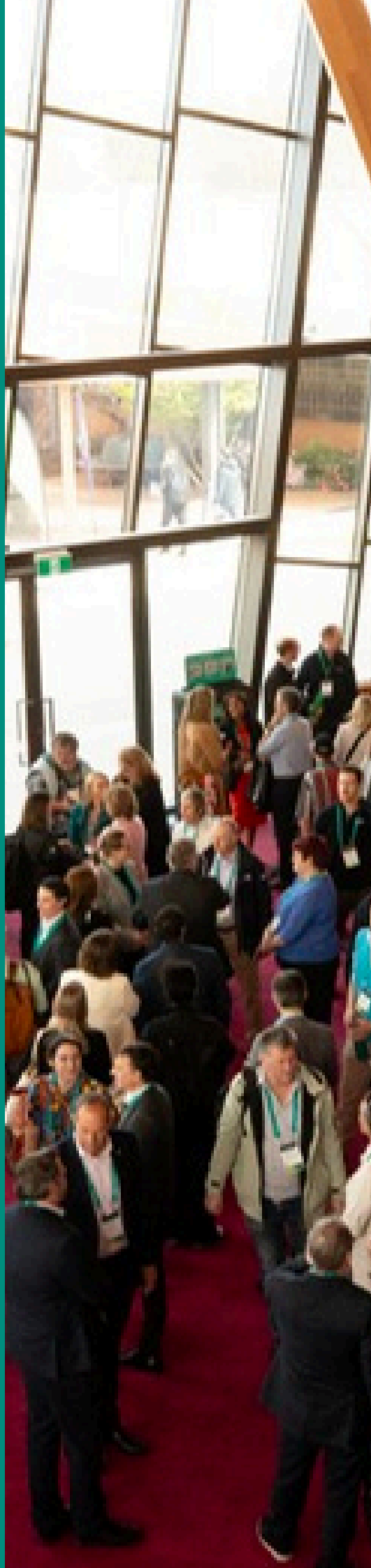
SPONSORS
43 valued sponsors

SESSIONS
148 engaging sessions

QUESTIONS ASKED
341 valued questions asked

CONFERENCE BUDGET
$489,112

ECONOMIC IMPACT
$771,659 Latrobe City Data Report 2025

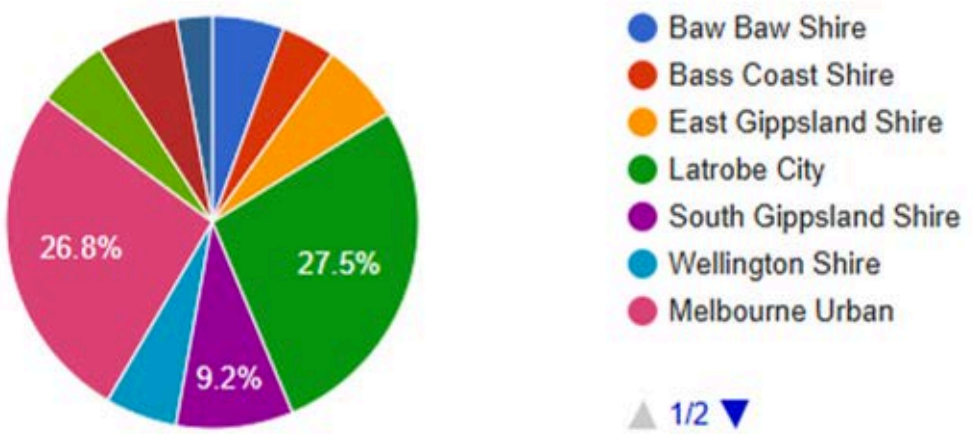


REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

A total of **142 delegate responses** were received for the 2025 Gippsland New Energy Conference (GNEC25) post conference survey, compared with **134 responses in 2024**. The **Exhibitors and Sponsors Survey** attracted **15 responses**, a decrease from 42 in 2024 — noting that last year's higher figure was due to the survey being inadvertently distributed to all delegates.

Q: Where is the usual place you live?



From the survey, **27.5% of respondents were from Latrobe City,** with a further **30.9% representing the wider Gippsland region. 26.8% were based in metropolitan Melbourne, 5.8% from other regional areas of Victoria, 6.3% from interstate,** and **2.8% international attendees**.

These figures are broadly consistent with GNEC24, showing a **slight increase in participation from Gippsland-based delegates.** The relatively high proportion of responses from Gippsland may suggest that **local attendees were more inclined to engage with post-event feedback,** reflecting their sense of ownership and investment in the outcomes.

Survey responses show that **35% of attendees represented industry** and **8% were from New Energy proponents,** making up **43% of the total**. A further **21% came from the government sector, 12% from education,** and **13% from community organisations.** The remaining participants included Traditional Owner representatives and members of the broader not-for-profit sector.

In addition to these formal surveys, feedback was gathered through **working group reflections, stakeholder correspondence,** and **direct emails**. Together, these inputs provide an overview of delegate experiences, exhibitor perspectives, and partner insights, forming the basis for the recommendations outlined in this review.

CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

A total of **1,020 delegates registered for GNEC25** via the **Whova app**, with **830 actively engaging** by downloading and using the platform during the conference. Many of those who registered solely for the **Supplier Networking Function** did not download or use the app, which explains part of the difference between registration and engagement numbers.

Whova's location data, drawn from delegates who fully checked in, showed a **broad geographic spread: 293 attendees from metropolitan Melbourne, 8 from England, 3 from Taiwan,** and **4 from Scandinavia** — reflecting the conference's growing national and international reach.

GNEC25 also **expanded its program** with a series of **complementary events**, including the **Supplier Networking Function** (114 attendees), **Farm Tours** (25 attendees), and the Au**stralian Centre for Offshore Wind (ACOWE) Technical Symposium**, held on the Thursday following the main conference. The ACOWE Symposium attracted around **150 participants**, including **over 60 guests at the welcome function** on the preceding Wednesday evening.

REFLECTIONS ON GNEC25

GNEC25 partnered with the Global Energy Council to offer joint ticketing with the **APAC Wind Energy Summit** held the following week. While only nine delegates took up the joint ticket option, the collaboration contributed to greater international visibility for the event. The partnership, combined with GNEC's growing local reputation, has helped position the conference as a **significant regional forum for the global energy transition**, reinforcing Gippsland's role on the international stage.

> *"I came all the way from Norway to attend the GNEC conference this week. Having attended many international events and conferences before, what a breath of fresh air GNEC was. The resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit of the Gippsland community was simply radiating. It really drove home the point of the importance of partnering with local businesses for an international specialized offshore energy consultancy like us. I really enjoyed myself"*
>
> - **Håkon Eidsvik**

> *"You know your conference has gone international when three Norwegians report they met each other for the first time in Traralgon, and a Belarusian finds common ground — and speaks Russian — with a Drouin local in the foyer of GPAC."*

Gippsland representation remained strong, with a noticeable increase in community and not-for-profit participation. This trend suggests growing public engagement in Gippsland's energy transition, reflecting a shift in local sentiment — from seeing the transition as possible to probable.

> *Very strong networking opportunity. After 4 years it's amazing to see the progress and continued growing support for this conference and the importance of the messaging. A keystone for Gippsland's future progress.*

The complementary activities were praised as **valuable additions** to the overall conference experience. The **ACOWE Symposium** received **100% positive feedback,** with participants highlighting its technical depth and collaborative spirit, while also noting that **stronger coordination with the main conference** would enhance future integration.

The **Farm Tours** were commended for their **high quality and on-ground insights,** though there needed to be greater participation with suppliers and technology providers within the tour.

> *I'm writing to extend a hearty thank you and congratulations on yet another successful GNEC. We at Farmers for Climate Action are very grateful for the opportunity extended to us to speak at the conference and attend with members of the team.*
>
> *The inclusion of the ag / farm-focussed forum was a particular positive for us. Whilst GNEC has always endeavoured to have themed sessions, I believe that having the dedicated afternoon forum was really advantageous both from an attendee's perspective, and from a presenter's perspective. It provided the opportunity to contextualise our presentation and tie it into some of the others on either side of it, which strengthened messaging for those who came to listen. I hope that this format can be maintained into the future.*
>
> - **Ben Gebert – Farmers for Climate Action**

The **Supplier Function** was regarded as an important addition. The breakfast session was "jam-packed with different local businesses" creating an energetic atmosphere and strong networking momentum early in the conference.

Participants appreciated the practical focus and the opportunity to meet a wide range of suppliers and project representatives in one setting.

> *"The industry breakfast went really well — lots of good feedback from that event. Many people were talking about it. ICN led the session and they were spectacular to work with."*

There was also a suggestion that future events **rotate the hosting organisation** to share opportunities and bring fresh perspectives, while maintaining the successful format and focus on real-world industry connections.

A proposed **Youth Summit in Korumburra** was unfortunately cancelled due to low registrations, possibly reflecting competition with other youth-focused events held earlier in the year.

Feedback indicated that **future youth engagement should be more closely embedded within the main conference program**, with students from local schools invited to attend.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: Grow GNEC as Regional Australia's Flagship Energy Conference.

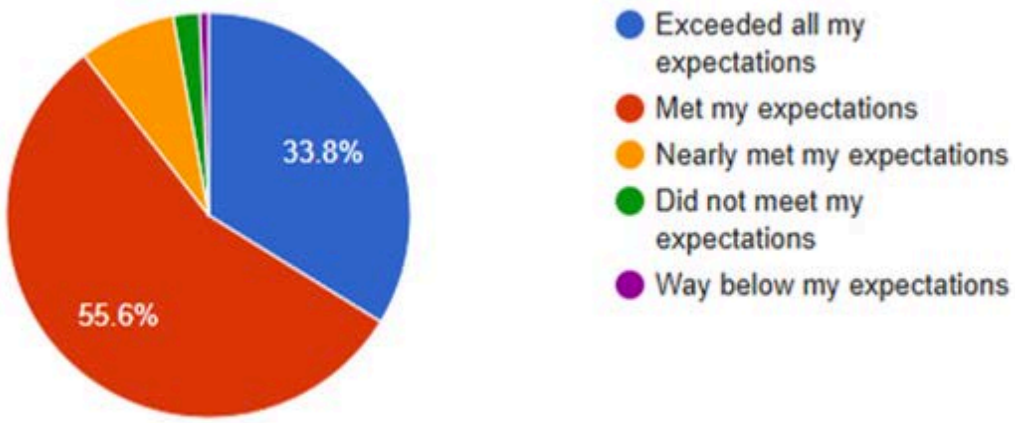
a) Continue GNEC in 2026 at the same venue, at a similar time of year.

b) Consolidate and strengthen the Supplier Function, Regional Farm Tours, and ACOWE Technical Symposium as signature components of the GNEC program.

c) Enhance youth participation by developing meaningful pathways for students and young people to engage directly with the main conference.

THE CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

Q: To what extent did this conference meet your expectations?



Overall, **89.4% of respondents reported that GNEC25 met or exceeded their expectations,** consistent with previous years — **GNEC24 (93.3%), GNEC23 (89.8%),** and **GNEC22 (89.6%).** Satisfaction remains high, reflecting the continued strength of the conference format and program.

GNEC now operates within a more crowded event calendar, with many delegates attending multiple energy and climate conferences throughout the year — some reporting GNEC25 as their fifth conference in twelve months. This reinforces the importance of **preserving GNEC's distinctive regional identity,** characterised by a **welcoming, community-driven atmosphere**, a **focus on regional innovation**, and an a**ccessible platform that connects industry, government, and local voices** in ways metropolitan conferences cannot replicate.

> *"This year very much felt like the transition is really happening in Gippsland. As someone in the industry and a Traralgon local, it gives me a huge sense of pride to host GNEC in my hometown."*

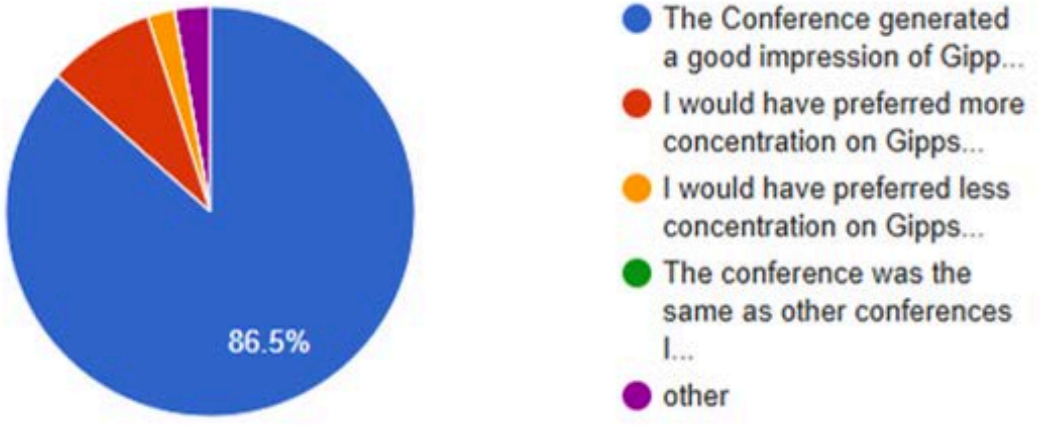
There was feedback that the session featuring multiple offshore wind proponents should have been held in the main auditorium rather than the Little Theatre, given its local significance and audience interest. Despite this, participants praised the facilitator for delivering a **high-quality, engaging session**, reinforcing that **Australia's first declared offshore wind zone remains a defining point of difference** for Gippsland and GNEC.

There were comments that the program felt too cluttered, with too many short 15-minute sessions that limited meaningful discussion. Several delegates suggested reducing lecture-style presentations in favour of panel sessions that allow for genuine audience interaction and time for questions. Simplifying the schedule and allowing sessions to breathe and develop more naturally would help deepen engagement, encourage dialogue, and create a more rewarding experience for both speakers and delegates.

REGIONAL IMPACT AND DEVELOPING GIPPSLAND'S REPUTATION

The conference continues to serve as a powerful platform to showcase Gippsland's leadership in the energy transition. It also provides a unique opportunity to engage with "old energy" and to confront the reality of aging infrastructure, workforce transition and mine rehabilitation.

Q: The Conference aimed to have a local flavour promoting a desire to build a New Energy future for Gippsland. Can you tell us your impressions of this?



86.5% of respondents said the event left them with a **favourable view of the transition in Gippsland with 75.2%** of respondents agreed that **Gippsland is well prepared or performing strongly** in its approach to New Energy.

Feedback from speakers highlighted that the audience was safe, respectful, and highly engaged, with thoughtful questions that sought genuine understanding rather than provocation.

The conference's success was later referenced at the APAC Conference in Melbourne the following week, where Gippsland was highlighted as a success story for renewable energy in rural Australia. The conference exists to put our region and its opportunities on the renewables map.

GNEC25 featured a special backstage briefing for **Gippsland local councillors** and **senior leaders** from key government and regional organisations, including **Offshore Wind Energy Victoria (OWEV), VicGrid, DCCEEW, TAFE Gippsland,** and **Regional Development Victoria (RDV).** The session, **facilitated by Sara Rhodes-Ward** and **coordinated by the Gippsland Alliance for Climate Action (GACA),** provided a valuable opportunity for open dialogue and information exchange. Participants described it as a highly productive session that fostered mutual understanding and strengthened relationships between local and state leaders — another example of how the conference serves as a vital platform for building local support and regional collaboration.

The conference also **inspires and educates our local community,** creating a network of enthusiastic advocates who carry the message of renewable energy back into their communities. Through their involvement, they **become ambassadors for Gippsland's transition,** sharing positive experiences and helping to build **social licence** and understanding for new energy projects.

> *"I got up early yesterday morning to add quite a few extra pages about my favourite GNEC 2025 experiences to the PowerPoint presentation for my morning Renewables Class at U3A Wonthaggi yesterday. It was an amazing session which went over so well and was so well received by the whole class of 18 people. And yes, the enthusiasm was once again, extremely contagious Many thanks to you and your amazing team! !"*
>
> **Werner Theinert.**

> *"I would like to drop all the organisers of the GNEC conference a note of gratitude and thanks. I was very grateful to be the recipient of a community ticket to attend the 2025 conference. As an organising member of "Nana's for Action", I obtained valuable information which we are able to share with the Latrobe Valley Community. Our main aim is to share a positive message about the future to our community."*
>
> **Anna Hall**
> **(presented on a lovely card)**

VENUE NAVIGATION AND PARKING

There was feedback that some delegates found the venue difficult to navigate, suggesting that a clearly displayed venue map and additional fingerboard-style directional signage would make it easier for people to move between conference spaces. Parking was again mentioned as an area for improvement.

PEOPLE CONNECTION, AND ATMOSPHERE

The **networking components** of GNEC25 were also widely praised. The introduction of the **SEC "all-weather" Pavilion** in the forecourt provided a vibrant space for informal discussion and connection. **78.8% of respondents** said the **AGL Networking Event** at the close of Day One met or exceeded expectations. While some attendees did note that the event was noisy and bar service congested at times, the overall atmosphere was energetic and engaging.

> *"Especially enjoyed the fun, casual and community feel of the conference. I think this tone was very well set by Darren who has great energy, and the drinks/networking sessions offered"*

It was hard to hear the speaker at the networking function and this could be better located to improve the experience.

Delegates expressed genuine enthusiasm for **in-person connection** after extended periods of virtual interaction, describing the conference as "energising but exhausting." Afternoon sessions were noticeably quieter, likely reflecting the intensity of the program. Respondents suggested incorporating **alternative, informal evening activities —** such as karaoke, trivia, or interactive social sessions — to help sustain energy levels and **reinforce GNEC's reputation as a friendly, distinctive, and community-oriented conference.**

There was strong feedback that GNEC25 continues to feel like a genuine community event, where people are friendly, approachable, and united by a shared commitment to linking the energy transition with the local community. Small touches — such as the Rotary "sausage sizzle" and the volunteer team in their distinctive teal vests — added to the welcoming atmosphere and helped create the special sense of place and connection that makes GNEC unique.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Create a very different Conference experience

a)Protect GNEC's Regional Identity and our "Home Advantage"

- Emphasise that Gippsland is the heart of Australia's energy transition from a tradition of extensive coal fired power to a diverse array of renewable energy projects — using storytelling, local case studies, and visible community participation to keep the event distinctive amid growing competition.
- Involve former coal workers in guided tours and community engagement activities that explain the energy transition from a lived experience, helping to demystify the process and provide a relatable human perspective on change.
- Continue offering affordable ticket options for Gippsland residents, creating opportunities to showcase local businesses, and ensuring strong representation of regional speakers across the conference program.

b) Elevate and Improve Key Sessions

- Prioritise main auditorium placement for high-interest panels — such as those featuring offshore wind proponents — to maximise visibility and reinforce Gippsland's leadership narrative in the energy transition.
- Simplify and declutter the program by reducing the number of short sessions, instead focusing on fewer, higher-impact panels that allow ample time for audience questions and discussion.

c) Diversify the Program

- Introduce light, social activities — such as karaoke, trivia, or live music — to foster camaraderie and offer enjoyable alternatives to formal sessions.
- Review the pacing of the conference to include more flexible scheduling, additional networking opportunities, bus trips, and interactive elements that contribute to a vibrant and engaging atmosphere.

d) Enhance Signage to improve venue navigation

- Develop and display clear venue maps at key entry points and install fingerboard directional signs throughout the precinct to assist delegates in navigating between conference rooms, the expo hall, and outdoor areas.

e) Address Parking

- Work with the venue to improve parking access and traffic flow, ensuring clear communication of available parking options in pre-event materials. Monitor progress on the new parking areas scheduled for completion in 2026 and integrate them into future event planning.

CONTENT AND PROGRAM DESIGN

It is important to recognise that businesses invest valuable time and resources to send their teams to GNEC, and they expect a tangible return on that investment — through new ideas, stronger networks, and deeper industry insights. Delegates consistently indicated that high-profile keynote speakers, parliamentary leaders, and thought-provoking presentations make the conference experience worthwhile.

Keynote speakers such as Alison Reeves from the Grattan Institute, Katharine York from Grimsby discussing the Catapult Project, and Ross Garnaut were specifically mentioned as standouts who added depth and authority to the program.

Several participants felt, however, that morning keynote sessions were too short, and that fewer concurrent sessions would allow more delegates to attend and enjoy these presentations fully. The inclusion of adventurer Tim Cope was seen as adding value — not directly energy-related, yet valuable for his motivational storytelling and local Gippsland connection. Future programs might consider opening or closing each day with a speaker of this kind, using their broader appeal to attract and energise the audience.

A recurring theme in feedback was that sessions often felt rushed, with limited time for audience questions.

> *"The agenda was far too complicated, resulting in an almost constant movement of people in and out during sessions. It would be much better to stick to standard start and finish times. Have two venues offering longer sessions and two offering shorter sessions... with set break times."*

There were also useful suggestions to **colour-code the agenda** to make it easier to follow thematic streams.

There was some criticism of the **gender representation on panels,** wanting a more balanced mix of voices:

> *"I would suggest that the organisers do not allow all-male panels ('manels'). Other conferences find this pretty straightforward to achieve — even oil and gas conferences. It was very obvious, especially following the Women in Energy breakfast."*

In terms of content focus, the program did receive positive feedback for its breadth, but respondents expressed interest in seeing **more sessions on batteries, community energy solutions, climate change mitigation, working on Country, green hydrogen,** and **supply chain development.** There was also a call to i**nvolve large Operator Asset Management companies (OAMs)** such as Siemens and Hitachi to provide a systems-level perspective.

There was feedback that delegates appreciated GNEC25 for addressing some of the more challenging conversations — including reflections from the union movement, frustrations about the pace of the energy transition, and the social impacts of infrastructure such as overhead transmission lines. Participants valued the opportunity for open and honest dialogue, noting that **respectful discussion of difficult issues should remain a defining hallmark of the conference.**

The **Gippsland Women in Energy Breakfast** is a locally grown tradition that has blossomed into a cornerstone of the conference. It offers the industry a moment to reflect on its legacy while shaping a new paradigm of inclusion and greater participation across the energy workforce. This year's conference also saw the launch of the **gippslandnewenergy.com.au/women-in-energy** website, reinforcing the message that "you can't be what you can't see." By sharing local stories of inspiring women, the initiative encourages others to see themselves as leaders and changemakers in the energy transition.

Delegates are also seeking **greater diversity of experience** beyond the traditional fare at these conferences:

> *"More young people's perspectives at the conference. More about how the arts can be part of energy transition — science communication, human behaviour change, social impact... Loved the Future Council film."*

Delegates **valued bold programming —** one that **pushes boundaries, encourages debate,** and **creates room for audience interaction.**

> *"I just wanted to write to say thank you for putting on such a great conference. Easily the best new energy conference I've attended. The energy exchange was inspired and meeting the open cut collective was such a welcome treat. The conference really helped refocus my mind on the importance and scale of the job we're trying to do."*
>
> **Jonty Peterson**

A successful innovation at GNEC25 was the **"Energy Exchange,"** which gave delegates the opportunity to curate their own 30-minute sessions. True to GNEC's inclusive spirit, this space welcomed voices that might not normally appear on the main stage, creating room for fresh ideas and unexpected conversations. Expanding on this model through open-stage or self-directed formats could further encourage spontaneous participation and showcase the diversity of opinion that continues to be one of GNEC's greatest strengths.

> *"I also want to reach out to express my truly heart warm thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak this year! The case I presented is basically a business case for a half-cost grid and I have an open query with VicGrid on that. There was a guy from VicGrid in the audience and he had a fair few really good questions that I think may have boosted my case with them a bit. Wouldn't have happened without this face-to-face opportunity! Who knows Darren, something really big might come out of this. Exciting times!"*
>
> **Per Nystrom**

There were also calls to extend the conference experience beyond the venue, with suggestions for site tours such as Marinus Link locations, offshore wind developments, ports, and emerging project sites. These could be positioned as optional "Day 2.5" or third-day experiences, providing tangible, on-the-ground insight into the energy transition.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: Evolve and Enrich the GNEC Program

a) Simplify and streamline the program

- Reduce overlap between sessions and adopt standardised start/finish times.
- Build in time for questions and discussion to deepen engagement.
- Use colour-coded themes on the agenda for easy navigation

b) Enhance keynote impact

- Extend keynote sessions and seek National and International thought leaders. Avoid dates that coincide with Parliamentary sittings to encourage attendance from political and ministerial leaders.
- Consider closing each day with a compelling local or inspirational speaker that is not necessarily energy related.

c) Improve gender balance

- Ensure gender balance and diversity across panels and sessions.
- Continue to highlight the Gippsland Women in Energy Breakfast as a signature feature of the conference that celebrates inclusion and leadership in the sector.

d) Expand Self-Directed Content

- Strengthen the Energy Exchange concept for delegate curation.
- Introduce open stages or "lightning sessions" to invite spontaneous delegate participation.

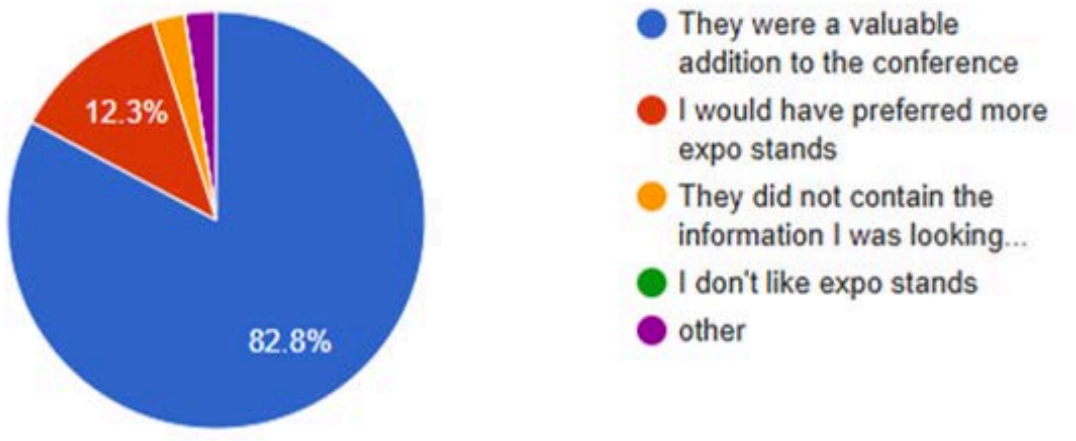
e) Deepen the Learning Experience

- Offer site visits and technical tours (e.g., Marinus Link, ports, or OWEV projects) as part of a "GNEC Field Day" or optional third day.
- Include sessions on the Arts for transition, young people's perspective and social impact.

THE EXPO HALL

The **Expo Hall** located in the town hall at the end of the precinct continues to be an important feature of GNEC, offering a dynamic space for informal conversations and one-on-one engagement.

Q: Can you tell us your impression of the Expo Hall?



82.8% of respondents said the expo was a "valuable addition to the conference," with a further 1**2.3%** indicating they would have liked to see **more expo stalls**. For many delegates, the expo provided the ideal environment for meaningful connections — often more personal and productive than those made during formal sessions.

While **77% of exhibitors** were satisfied with their location, a small number expressed concern about being placed in **lower-traffic areas,** noting that "some attendees did not know the location we were in was active with booths." Others commented that **the expo was difficult to navigate during peak times,** suggesting that improvements to **layout and signage** would enhance the experience for both exhibitors and delegates.

It is important to acknowledge these areas for improvement while also recognising that the **expo site added significant value** to the overall conference. Exhibitors consistently highlighted the quality of engagement and the positive atmosphere. One exhibitor summed it up:

> *"Fantastic work — congratulations on another well-crafted, supported, and executed conference. The inclusive atmosphere nurtured a sense of transparency, true collaboration, and genuine optimism not seen in other conferences or events. Sincere thanks from all of the Ørsted team for staging a genuinely beneficial experience for our team."*

There was also **strong positive feedback about the integration of the art installation,** which added creativity, texture, and a distinctive atmosphere to the exhibition space.

There were also suggestions to open the Expo Hall to the wider community, particularly school students, who would benefit from the interactive displays and the opportunity to speak directly with industry participants.

There is an opportunity to expand the main stage program to include special announcements and product or project launches during the conference. Sponsors and partners could be invited to use the stage to share positive news, showcase initiatives, or celebrate milestones in front of the GNEC audience.

From a logistics perspective, sponsor ticketing and expo staffing remain an issue to be improved. While sponsorship guarantees at least one person to manage the expo site, several sponsors requested additional "expo helper" passes, with some requiring ten or more. While this ensures stalls are well-staffed and engaging, it places pressure on catering and overall event logistics. Future conferences will need to balance adequate exhibitor support with fair and sustainable ticketing structures, avoiding unintended loopholes for free conference entry.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: Make the Expo Hall the Heart of the Conference

a) **Create a new Expo site and develop a "GNEC Town Square"**
Create an additional expo zone by integrating Rooms 1 and 2, connecting this area with the outdoor stage, seating, and Pavilion to reinforce the concept of a central "Town Square." This expanded space should be offered first to Platinum, Gold, and Silver sponsors, recognising their contribution and need for high visibility**.**

b) **Develop the main stage.**
Develop a structured "Main Stage Spotlight" program that allows sponsors and key partners to deliver short, high-impact announcements or launches during the conference.

c) **Enhance foot traffic to the existing town hall Expo site**
Enhance signage and visual cues to better promote the existing Town Hall expo area and activate the stage as a "Knowledge Theatre" — hosting short presentations, demonstrations, and speaker sessions. Investigate whether an additional coffee spot could be placed there to encourage foot traffic.

d) **Open the Expo spaces to the Community**
Provide dedicated opportunities for local residents, schools, and youth groups to experience the Expo Hall. This could include guided tours, open sessions, or dedicated "Community Hours" where students and the public can explore exhibits, meet industry representatives, and engage with hands-on energy demonstrations.

e) **Refine Ticketing and Staffing Policies**
Introduce a clear framework for sponsor and exhibitor ticket allocations to balance staffing needs with catering and capacity limits.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CATERING

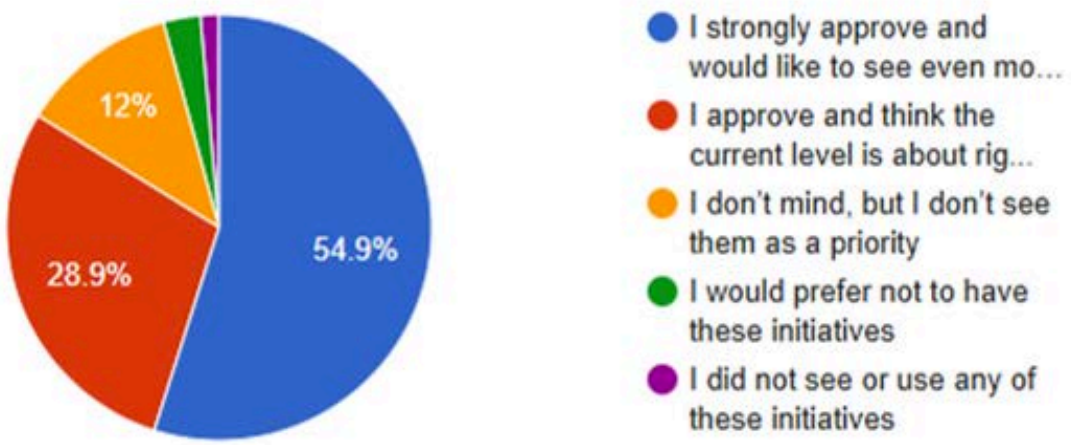
Catering at GNEC25 was well received, with 73.2% of delegates reporting that it met or exceeded their expectations. One respondent even described it as "the best catering they had ever seen at a conference."Positive feedback centred on quality and freshness, and many attendees also praised the **Iberdrola Fruit Wagon** as a highlight.

Some constructive feedback was received around **menu variety, clarity of food labelling,** and the **management of dietary restrictions**, particularly for those with allergies. The **lunch queues,** especially on Day One, were also noted as an area for improvement to streamline service and reduce congestion.

There was a **missed opportunity to better showcase Gippsland's renowned fresh produce** and highlight the region's strong connection between **farm, food, and sustainability**. In previous years — notably at **GNEC23** — a short video presentation celebrated local farmers and producers who supplied ingredients for the conference, providing a meaningful link between the event and the region's agricultural strengths

Reintroducing this connection would help celebrate Gippsland's vibrant food economy and strengthen the narrative of local sustainability in action. Partnering again with Food & Fibre Gippsland would provide a natural platform to source local suppliers, tell producer stories, and promote regional pride through the conference catering experience. It was also suggested that stalls or displays from the Food and Fibre sector could be a valuable addition to the Expo Hall, further showcasing Gippsland's agricultural innovation and its integral role in the new energy transition.

Q: What do you feel about the sustainability initiatives introduced this year?



The **sustainability initiatives** introduced this year were overwhelmingly well received. **83.8% of delegates** either approved or strongly approved of the **reusable cups, utensils, and separate waste-stream bins,** which reinforced GNEC's commitment to environmental leadership. However, the **app used to manage Keep Cups** drew mixed feedback, with one delegate noting:

> *"Remove the app for the Keep Cups. Just hand them out — I spent most of my time helping people with the apps."*

Many attendees expressed hesitation about providing card details through the app, suggesting that a simpler approach would have been more user-friendly.

The **Tree Planting Day** held prior to the conference was another success that demonstrated practical environmental stewardship. This initiative helped set a positive tone for the event and could be further developed as a recurring pre-conference sustainability activity.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: Deliver a Sustainable and Efficient Catering Experience

a) **Improve Catering Flow and Accessibility**

- Review catering logistics to reduce queue times, particularly during peak lunch periods.
- Ensure clear food labelling and communication of dietary options for delegates with allergies or restrictions.

b) **Simplify Sustainability Tools**

- Retain reusable cups and utensils but simplify their distribution — removing unnecessary app-based systems.
- Communicate sustainability practices clearly to delegates before and during the event.

c) **Celebrate Sustainable Practices**

- Continue the Tree Planting Day as an annual pre-conference tradition, potentially partnering with Committee for Gippsland, local schools or Landcare groups.

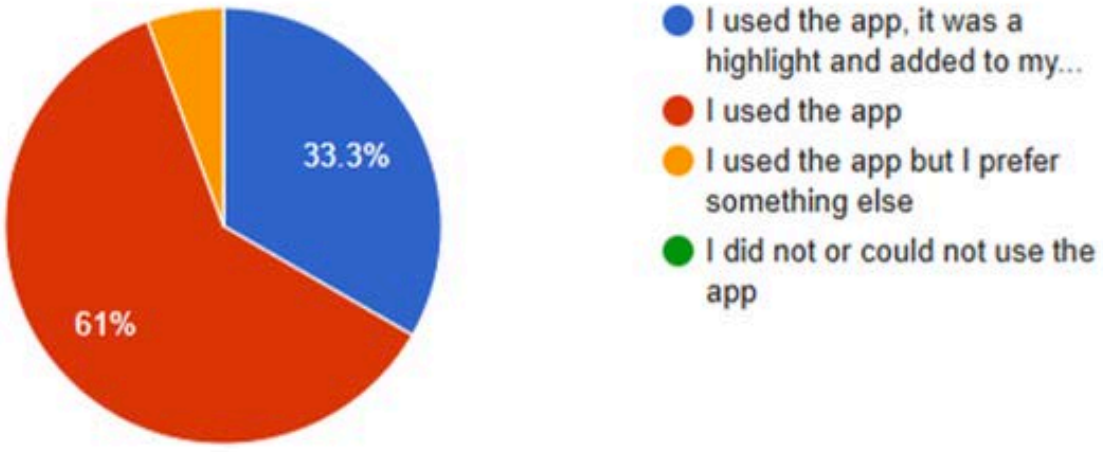
d) **Reconnect Conference Catering with Gippsland Producers**

- Re-establish a partnership with Food & Fibre Gippsland to showcase local food choices at GNEC26.

DIGITAL TOOLS AND TICKETING EXPERIENCE

The **Whova app** continued to play a central role in connecting delegates and facilitating engagement throughout GNEC25. **83% of participants downloaded the app,** and all survey respondents reported using it.

Q: What did you think about the conference app (Whova)?



33.3% of delegates described the app as a **highlight**, while **61%** said they used it primarily as a **functional tool**—a slight decline from previous years. Many attendees valued Whova for its convenience but felt the interface was becoming dated and less intuitive:

"The agenda was very difficult to navigate via Whova. A screen-based or limited printed agenda showing streams and timelines would be better for mapping out my day."

Despite these concerns, Whova remained a **highly effective networking platform,** enabling **260 business card exchanges, 1,891 private messages, 9 job postings, and 1,139 community board messages.** Delegates also asked **341 questions** and received **124 replies** through the app, highlighting its continued value for interactivity and dialogue. The app could also be used to **collect real-time session feedback**, helping organisers identify the most engaging presentations.

The **Whova leaderboard** remained popular, with opportunities to expand its use—such as offering points for visiting exhibitors or speaking to sponsors in the Expo Hall—to encourage deeper engagement. Sponsors also benefited from **increased visits to their websites** via the app, adding measurable value to their participation.

However, as more delegates become accustomed to digital conference platforms, some questioned whether Whova has **kept pace with evolving user expectations:**

"The Whova App is better than no app, but there must be less clunky event apps available."

Given its rising cost, it may be time to review alternative event management platforms that offer comparable or improved functionality at a lower price.

TICKETING AND REGISTRATION

Ticketing and name badge management once again presented logistical challenges. Registrations were often transferred between delegates without prior notice, causing delays at check-in. The email-linked access system within the app added to the complexity, as some attendees registered using an assistant's or purchaser's email address rather than their own and then could not access WHOVA. There were comments that it would be easier to do the ticketing through the conference app and not through a separate try-booking account.

Several respondents also suggested **investigating the use of self-service registration kiosks,** like those used at **GWEC**, which were described as "much faster and easier" and could significantly streamline delegate check-in.
Feedback from the front desk highlighted the need to **sort name tags alphabetically** and **colour-code them by category** (e.g. speakers, exhibitors, off-campus events) for faster identification. Many on-site helpers required last-minute badges, creating a demand for a**dditional blank name tags.**

RECOMMENDATION SIX: Improve Digital Tools and Ticketing Efficiency

a) **Review Conference App**

- Assess alternative platforms to Whova that provide better usability, integration, and cost efficiency.
- Consider hybrid solutions—using the app for networking and speaker feedback while offering simplified printed or screen-based agendas.

b) **Streamline Ticketing and Check-In**

- Introduce clearer procedures for delegate substitutions before the event.

c) **Improve Name Badge Management**

- Sort badges alphabetically and colour-code by role (speaker, sponsor, volunteer, etc.) and ample blank cards for on-site changes.

SUPPORT THE VOLUNTEER TEAM

Much credit is due to our **dedicated volunteer team**, who once again exceeded expectations this year. **The front-of-house staff, room monitors, and event helpers** created a warm and welcoming atmosphere that perfectly reflected the spirit of GNEC.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to **strengthen and better coordinate this valued group** through **pre-event training and clearer role definitions,** ensuring every volunteer feels confident and well prepared. **A dedicated volunteer coordinator** should be appointed to oversee scheduling and communication.

Assigning a **bus monitor** to manage registrations and ensure participants board the correct buses on time. Finally, providing a **dedicated volunteer room** would give helpers a space to rest, recharge, and feel valued for their contribution throughout the event.

It was suggested we should introduce of **"Hospitality Cards"**—priority passes allowing front-of-house and event assistants to access catering quickly, minimising time away from their posts.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: Support and Strengthen our Volunteer Team

a) **Appoint Coordinators to assist.**

- Create a Volunteer Coordinator to oversee scheduling and communication with volunteers
- A Bus Coordinator to assist front-desk staff with registration and transport logistics.

b) **Introduce "Hospitality Cards"**

- Allow volunteers priority access to catering, coffee and amenities.

c) **Provide a dedicated volunteer room**

- Where team members can rest, refresh, and feel valued between their shifts

FURTHER VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE FLOOR

Participants also offered a wide range of other suggestions and observations aimed at refining future conferences that don't fit under our broad themes.

Program Enrichment and Academic Depth

Feedback about the **ACOWE Technical Symposium** was overwhelmingly positive. Respondents recommended that it be formally sponsored and potentially split into thematic streams to allow deeper discussion. Others proposed incorporating PhD presentations, workshops, and even a peer-reviewed journal partnership to give the symposium lasting academic value.

Tracking attendance numbers across sessions was also recommended to help organisers better match room sizes to audience interest.

Presentation and Technology Improvements

- Ensure presentation slides fit the screen correctly and specify aspect-ratio requirements in advance.
- Provide on-stage preview monitors in the auditorium so presenters can see their slides.
- Reduce sponsor-logo rotation frequency on backdrop screens to minimise distraction and instead display holding slides introducing panellists.
- Improve focus and lighting of the projection in the Little Theatre.

Accessibility and Amenities

Accessibility feedback was largely positive, but respondents suggested small adjustments to better accommodate those with **low mobility or neurodivergence.**

Recommendations included **high stools for networking areas, quieter seating options** outside the marquee, and **"please hold my place"** solutions for queuing. Delegates also requested **more workspaces, bar-height tables,** and **charging stations** for devices.

Program and Speaker Quality

Participants appreciated the strong government representation but suggested that **official speakers should bring new insights**, rather than repeating previously public information.

Some also expressed interest in **reviving a conference dinner** with a keynote guest speaker, as this format encouraged networking in earlier years.

While a few delegates proposed moving the conference to **South Gippsland** to generate new excitement, others felt that **Traralgon's accessibility** for Melbourne attendees remained a significant advantage.

Satellite and Side Events

The **Plantation Tour** and **Women in Renewables Breakfast** were praised as valuable additions. Stronger coordination from the central conference team could help expand such **satellite events,** reinforcing GNEC's diversity and inclusivity.

Amplify GNEC's Legacy

There is a clear opportunity to extend the positive energy and momentum of the conference beyond those who attended. **Sponsors and partners would benefit from access to high-quality photographs and short video clips** that capture the atmosphere, key moments, and personal stories of GNEC. Making these materials easily shareable across their networks would help amplify the event's reach and reinforce Gippsland's leadership in the energy transition.

Timely posting of delegate interviews, highlight reels, and positive social-media content would sustain the buzz in the weeks following the event, ensuring that GNEC's message continues to resonate.

To maintain visibility year-round, GNEC could also explore **branded merchandise** — such as T-shirts, hats, or reusable items — giving delegates a tangible way to show their support for Gippsland's renewable energy movement and continue promoting the region long after the conference concludes.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT: Continue to refine Logistics, Legacy and Accessibility

a) **Deepen Program and Symposium Offerings**

- Support the ACOWE Symposium and seek sponsorship for it. Look at adding a technical journal.

b) **Upgrade Technical and Accessibility Features**

- Standardise presentation specifications, improve screen visibility in little theatre, and enhance accessibility through thoughtful seating, work areas, and device-charging points.

c) **Boost Post-Event Visibility**

- Ensure sponsors, partners, and speakers have access to shareable photography and video content that highlights key moments and captures the unique atmosphere of the event immediately after the event.
- Develop a coordinated social-media strategy to release highlight videos, delegate messages, and stories immediately following the conference to maintain engagement and momentum.

d) **Introduce Branded Merchandise**

- Create sustainable, Gippsland-branded merchandise — such as shirts, hats, and reusable products — to extend the visibility of the conference and promote pride in the region's renewable energy transition.

OUR CONCLUSION

GNEC25 was, by every measure, an **overwhelming success** — a dynamic, inclusive, and proudly Gippsland-based event that continues to set the benchmark for regional energy conferences in Australia. Yet in an increasingly **competitive conference landscape, i**t is essential that we continue to **listen to feedback and refine what we do**, ensuring that each year's event evolves to meet the expectations of delegates, sponsors, and partners alike. Constructive feedback is not a criticism but a vital tool that helps us remain responsive, relevant, and distinctive.

Looking ahead, the **changing offshore-wind landscape,** with fewer licences and a more concentrated group of proponents following the recent auctions, may create challenges for **sponsorship and attendance** at GNEC26. This makes it even more important to **broaden our reach, diversify content**, and **strengthen our community, education, and innovation focus**. By doing so, GNEC will continue to be a space where industry, government, and community come together — not only to discuss the energy transition, but to shape it.

Remember if you **Deliver Gippsland, you will power a future made in Australia.**

Compiled by Darren McCubbin
Conference Manager
CEO Gippsland Climate Change Network
Co-Chair Gippsland Offshore Wind Alliance