

SIMEC Energy Australia Cultana Solar Farm

Market Research Report

Prepared by Mint Research

March 2019



Why do the research?

Background

SIMEC Energy Australia is amidst implementation of a large-scale renewable energy program in Whyalla, SA. The project aims to generate enough energy to power almost 100,000 average homes from one Australia's largest solar farms.

While improving the reliability and reducing the cost of energy, the project is expected to generate a shift in attitudes and uptake of residential renewable energy usage.

This research forms a part of the broader project's community consultation.

Objectives

The aim of this survey was to measure and understand residents' perspectives and awareness towards the SIMEC Energy Australia Cultana Solar Farm, including:

- Prompted awareness of SIMEC Energy Australia / SIMEC ZEN Energy;
- Familiarity with Cultana Solar Farm;
- Impact of the Solar Farm on Whyalla;
- Personal impact of the Cultana Solar Farm;
- Attitudes towards renewable energy; and
- Personal priorities during construction.

Methodology

Survey details

A short 5 minute telephone survey was conducted among n=300 residents of Whyalla. The telephone interviewing took place between February 18th and 26th 2019.

The questionnaire was developed by the SIMEC Energy Australia Project Team.

No quotas were set for interviews, therefore the proportion of those surveyed in the respective age and gender categories is based on natural fallout.

Analysis

Significant differences between subgroups have been called out where applicable, for comparisons by gender and age group (where possible).

The margin of error (95% CI) associated with a sample of n=300 at the 50th percentile is 5.62%, meaning that if the score for a particular question was 50% within the overall sample, we could be 95% confident the population result for all Whyalla lies between 44.38% and 55.62%.

Summary of findings and recommendations

Executive summary

Brand awareness and health

Awareness of SIMEC Energy Australia / SIMEC Zen Energy was mixed with about half (53%) having heard of the brand by either name.

Encouragingly, overall awareness levels increased to more than four in five (83%) when respondents were asked if they were familiar with the Cultana Solar Farm. Many (70%) knew it by name, with approximately one in ten (13%) aware of it in the absence of the name.

Across both measures of awareness and familiarity, males and those from the younger age cohort (under 50) were more like to be aware of SIMEC Energy Australia / SIMEC Zen Energy (63% and 62% respectively), and familiar with Cultana Solar Farm (89% and 90% respectively).

Beliefs and attitudes

The concept and notion of renewable energy was warmly received by the Whyalla residents surveyed, with the majority (86%) holding a positive personal opinion towards renewable energy.

Further, similarly high proportions (82%) believed this Solar Farm would have a positive impact on their community, primarily due to the creation of jobs and potentially cheaper energy prices. Females (87%) tended to be more likely to hold this overwhelmingly positive view when thinking about their local community.

Sentiment appeared to be more moderate when those surveyed rated the impact it would have on themselves, as just over half (57%) believed it would have a positive personal impact. However, not insignificant proportions (41%) held a neutral view, potentially indicating an ambivalence or lack of perceived personal relevance with regards to this Solar Farm.

Construction priorities

The protection of native vegetation was viewed as the number one priority (58%) to consider during the construction of Cultana Solar Farm, while control of dust was ranked second (43%). Nominating the protection of native vegetation as one of the top two priorities was higher among females (69%).

Recommendations

MAINTAINING POSITIVE SENTIMENT

The sentiment among Whyalla residents towards renewable energy and the impact of the Solar Farm on their community is overwhelmingly positive.

It will be necessary to manage communications during the construction phase of Cultana Solar Farm so as to maintain this positive sentiment among residents.

Support appears to be already entrenched within the community, particularly with the view that this development will bring jobs to the area as well potentially cheaper energy prices.

KEY COMMUNICATION TOPICS

Of highest priority is the protection of native vegetation and dust control. Communications should focus on these key topics of importance in order to actively address and manage residents' expectations.

OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN BRAND HEALTH

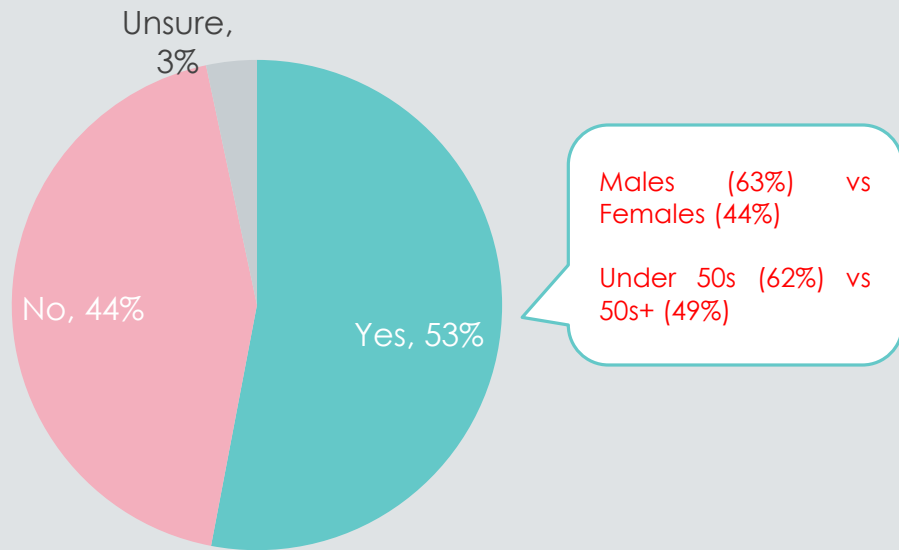
Leveraging positive sentiment already held by Whyalla residents in relation to renewable energy and community impact of the solar farm, provides an opportunity for SIMEC Energy Australia to strengthen brand awareness and other brand health metrics.

Analysis

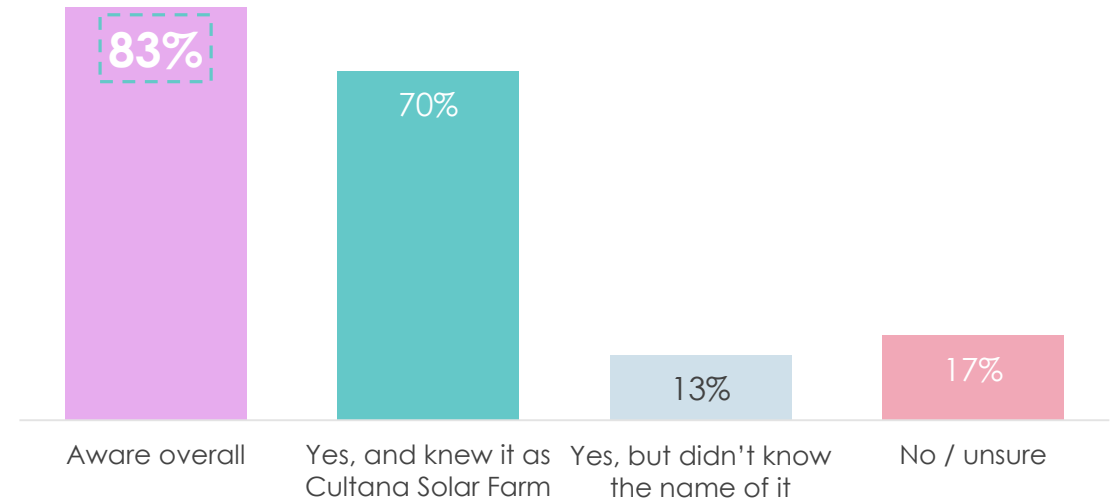
Awareness and familiarity

The majority of Whyalla residents surveyed were familiar with Cultana Solar Farm (with almost three quarters familiar by name). Awareness levels were lower (at around half) for the name(s) SIMEC Energy Australia / SIMEC Zen Energy. Amongst the sub groups surveyed, awareness tended to be higher among males and the younger age cohort.

SIMEC Energy Australia/SIMEC Zen Energy Awareness



Cultana Solar Farm Familiarity

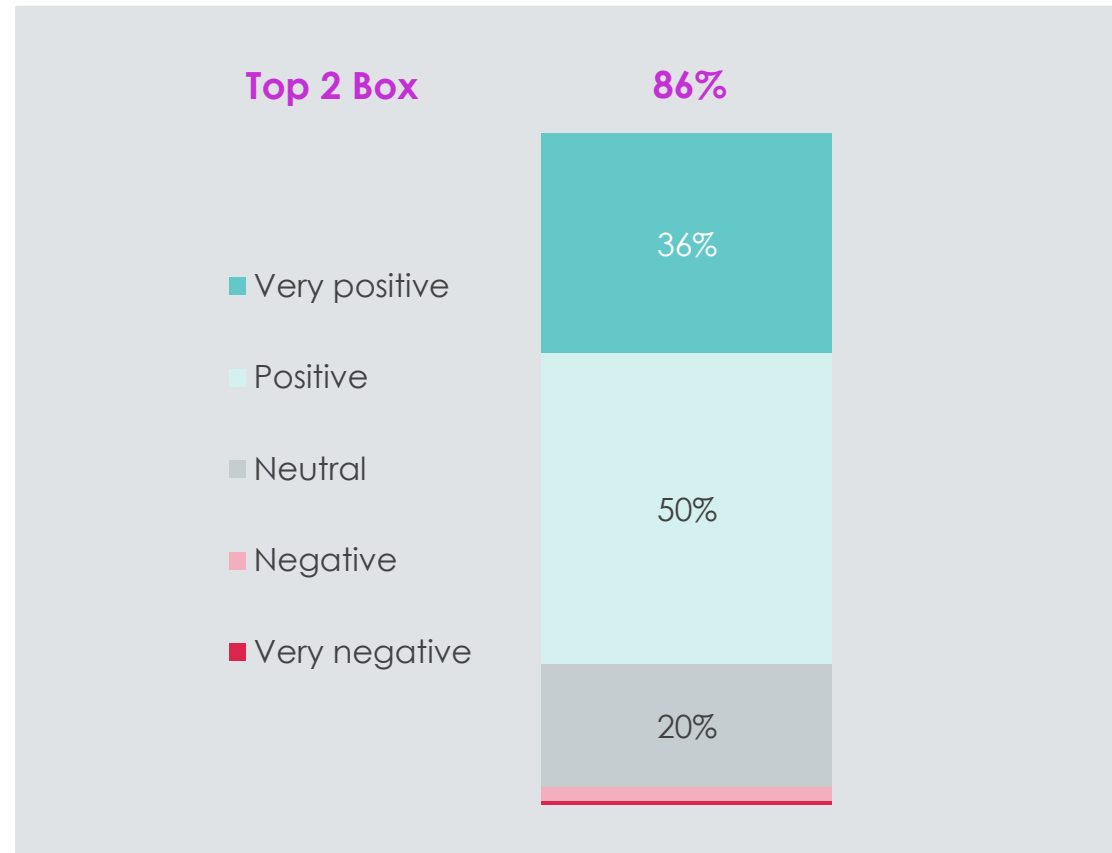


Males (89%) vs Females (79%)
 Under 50s (90%) vs 50s+ (80%)

Q1. Before today, have you heard of SIMEC Energy Australia or SIMEC Zen Energy? (n=300)
 Q2. Are you familiar with the Cultana Solar Farm (developed by SIMEC Energy Australia, formally SIMEC Zen Energy)? (n=300)

Attitudes towards renewable energy

Renewable energy as a source of power was viewed positively by the majority of Whyalla residents surveyed, with no statistically significant differences in opinion noted by age group or gender.

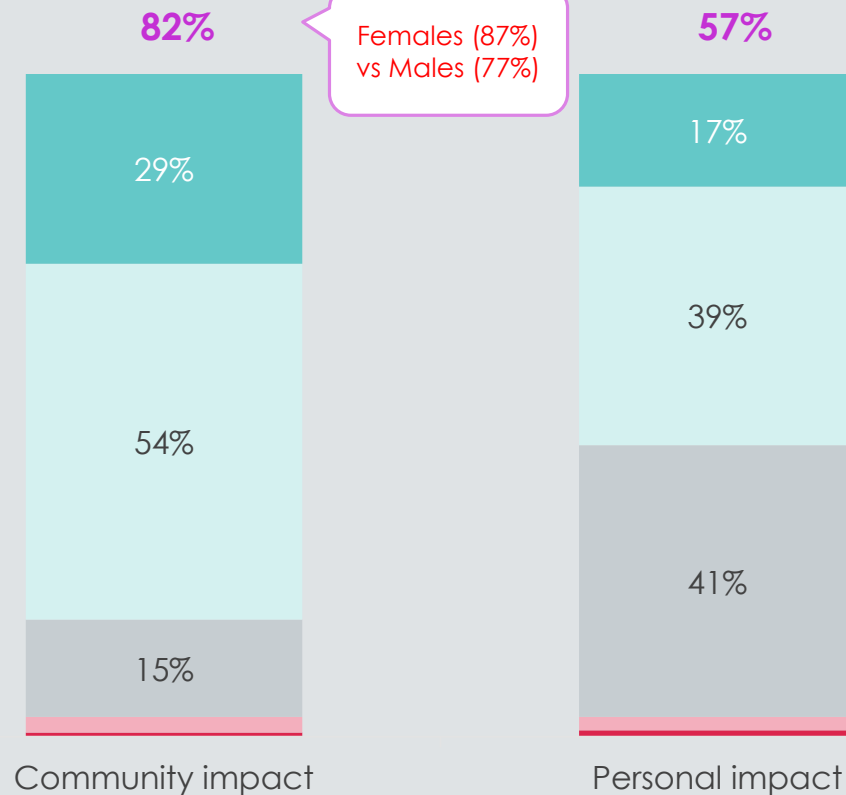


Solar farm impact

Overwhelmingly, the Solar Farm was seen as having a positive impact on the township of Whyalla. Interestingly, the proportion that believe it will have a positive *personal* impact was lower than the proportion that believe it will have a positive *community* impact. However, the difference in positivity was not due to increased negativity, but instead was countered by larger proportions who were neutral; suggesting a degree of ambivalence or lack of personal relevance.

Top 2 Box

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Very negative



Community Impact

Many of the comments relating to a positive community impact revolved around the creation of jobs and cheaper power.

- “ *The opportunity to create employment and hopefully to lower energy prices.* ”
- “ *Great prospects for employment cheaper and cleaner energy and a positive vibe for the area.* ”

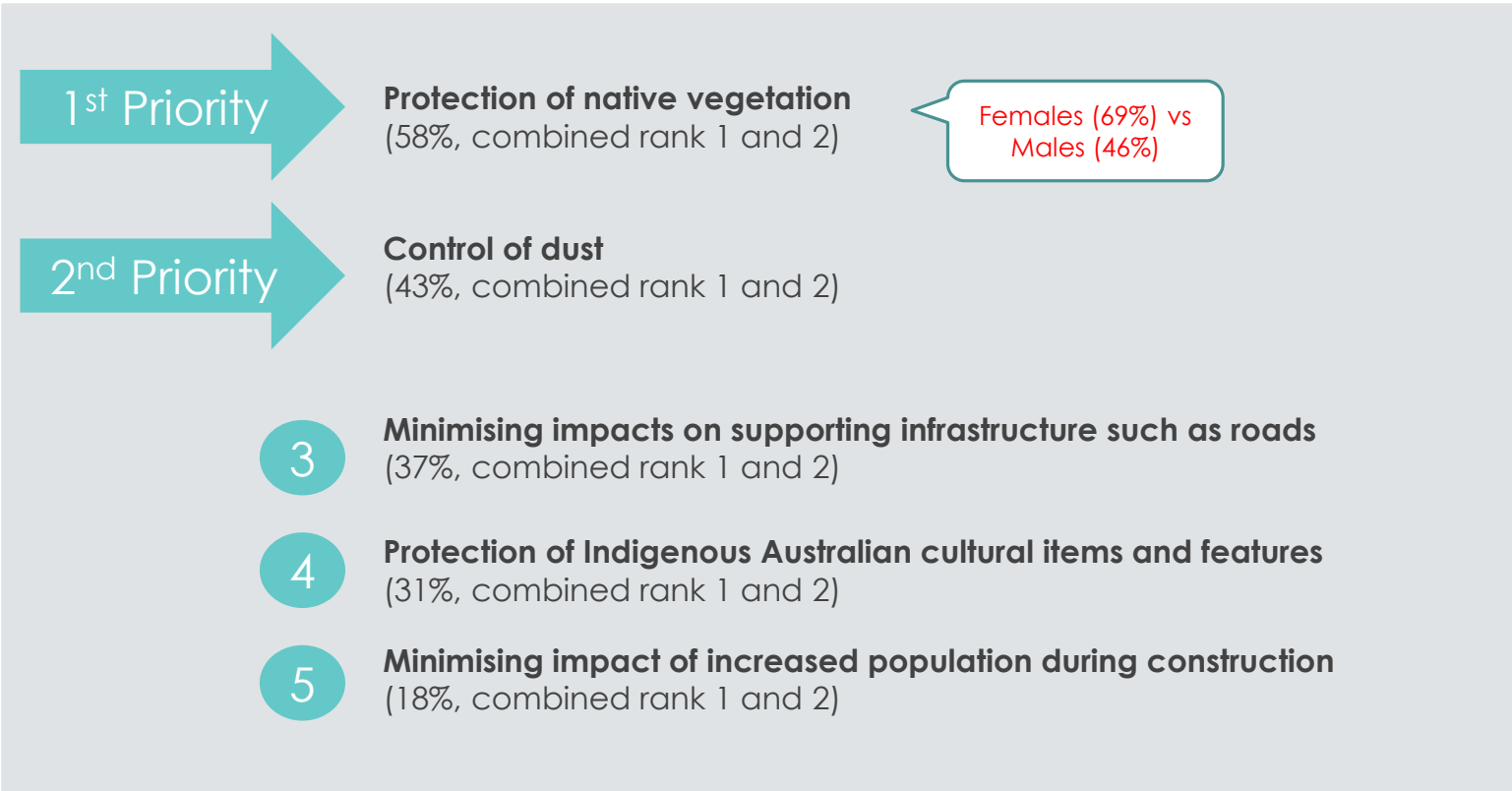
Personal Impact

Similar to community impacts, many of the comments given related to job creation and cheaper energy bills.

- “ *It will provide more jobs locally and it is great to be part of renewable energy.* ”
- “ *Bring down the cost of power bills and bring more jobs in the town.* ”

Construction priorities

Protection of native vegetation was considered the top priority by well over half of the residents surveyed, while control of dust was ranked overall second.



Priorities	Rank 1	Rank 2
Protection of native vegetation	31%	27%
Control of dust	24%	18%
Minimising the impacts on supporting infrastructure such as roads	16%	21%
Protection of Indigenous Australian cultural items and features	15%	15%
Minimising impact of increased population during construction	8%	10%

An aerial photograph of a vast solar farm. The solar panels are arranged in neat, parallel rows that stretch across the landscape. The panels have a light blue or greyish hue. In the lower right quadrant, a small, white, rectangular building is visible, likely a control or maintenance structure. The overall scene is a large-scale agricultural or industrial installation.

Who we spoke to

Sample overview

