



Powerlink Queensland Case Study

Executive Summary

Since 2021, Powerlink Queensland has partnered with Voconiq to build and manage social licence for large-scale renewable energy transmission through a longitudinal community insights program, Voconiq Local Voices.

The result is a measurable uplift in trust and acceptance, a clear, predictive model of social licence, and a shift from reactive engagement to proactive, evidence-led social performance.

Crucially, the program has enabled Powerlink to reduce delivery risk by identifying and managing the key drivers of community acceptance in real time - supporting more predictable infrastructure development at scale.

The Problem

- Rapid expansion of renewable energy infrastructure increasing community exposure and scrutiny
- Risk of project delays driven by community opposition and low trust
- High neutrality (undecided sentiment) across communities, indicating fragile social licence
- Limited ability to identify *causal drivers* of trust and acceptance
- Inconsistent, non-targeted engagement across regions

The Strategy

Voconiq implemented a Local Voices consisting:

- Large-scale regional surveys (1,950 participants in 2025 across 15+ LGAs in North, Central and Southern Queensland)
- Longitudinal tracking (2021/22 → 2025) to measure sentiment over time – the largest and most authoritative dataset of its kind in Australia
- Path modelling to identify **causal drivers of trust and acceptance**
- Regional and LGA-level analysis to enable targeted engagement
- Integration of findings into engagement, communication and investment strategy

This shifted Powerlink from broad, activity-based engagement to **precision, evidence-led social licence management**.

What Drives Social Licence (2025)

- #1 Benefits outweigh impacts (core trust driver)
- Procedural fairness (listening, responsiveness, transparency)
- Distributional fairness (equitable sharing of benefits)
- Confidence in regulation and oversight
- Alignment with renewable energy development

Trust is the **primary driver of acceptance**, confirming a clear and consistent social licence model across regions.

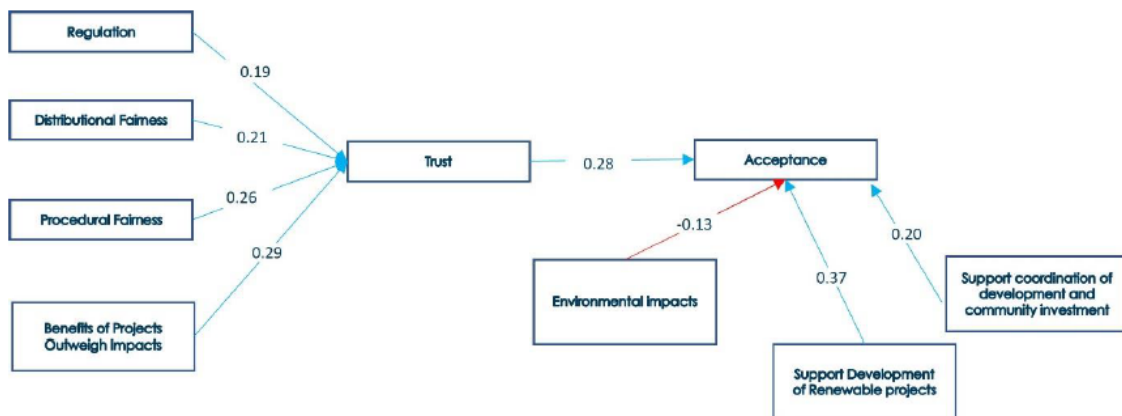


Fig.1. Voconiq Trust Model for Powerlink Queensland, overall.

Emerging Risk

- Persistently high neutrality across fairness and regulation measures
- Low engagement levels (~80% of communities report no direct contact with Powerlink)
- Localised declines in sentiment in specific LGAs (e.g. Banana, Gladstone, Maranoa)
- Increasing scrutiny of environmental impacts in some regions
- System-wide sensitivity to perceived fairness (particularly landholder treatment)

This indicates that while sentiment is improving, **social licence remains contingent and actively managed rather than secured.**

Impact

- Measurable uplift in trust (3.05) and acceptance (3.13) since 2024
- Clear, quantified model of social licence drivers across regions



- Identification of priority geographies and issues for targeted intervention
- Increased support for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure
- Improved alignment between engagement strategy and community expectations, leading to specific improvements in areas targeted
- Organisational shift from reactive engagement to proactive social performance

Strategic Outcome: Managing Delivery Risk at Scale

At program inception, Powerlink faced increasing risk of community opposition as infrastructure development accelerated.

Through independent, longitudinal community insight, Powerlink has been able to:

- Identify early signals of declining trust at regional and LGA levels
- Target engagement to the specific drivers of concern (e.g. fairness, environment, regulation)
- Strengthen the visibility of benefits and improve communication of value
- Build a consistent, evidence-based narrative for stakeholders and regulators

Result:

Improved trust and acceptance across Queensland, stronger support for renewable infrastructure, and a more predictable social environment for project delivery.

Outcome

Powerlink:

- Has the highest level of trust and acceptance of all backbone infrastructure developers in Australia
- Has created a social performance function and is maturing rapidly supported by regular, directional Local Voices insights
- Has a mechanism for demonstrating social licence risks and progress to key stakeholders (e.g. government, community representatives)
- Changed its engagement strategy to align with the data



- Invested in resilience-building initiatives rather than transactional, branding activities
- Utilised its convening power to coordinate engagement by multiple operators and developers in line with community demand

Forward Priorities

- Increase meaningful community contact and engagement frequency
- Improve transparency around decision-making, benefits, and regulation
- Strengthen communication of local economic and community value
- Enhance visibility of environmental management practices
- Maintain focus on fairness - particularly for directly impacted stakeholders

Bottom line

This program demonstrates a scalable, evidence-based model for managing social licence in large infrastructure delivery - transforming community sentiment from a source of risk into a measurable and manageable strategic asset.