

A year in review

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

December 2024

EnergyCo acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Wiradjuri, Wailwan (also known as Weilwan and Wayilwan), and Gamilaroi (also known as Gamilaraay and Kamilaroi) countries.

A message from Chief Executive Hannah McCaughey

As the newly appointed Chief Executive for EnergyCo, I'm honoured to step into this role at what is an exciting time for the Central-West Orana REZ.

This year we secured full planning approval for the REZ, making it the first in Australia to reach this historic milestone. This is a major step forward in our mission to deliver a clean, reliable and affordable energy future for NSW.

Another key highlight was the Minister for Energy Penny Sharpe granting ACERZ the licence to design, construct and operate approximately 240 kilometres of transmission lines and supporting infrastructure that will connect our renewable energy projects within the REZ. This is a vital step to delivering at least 4.5 gigawatts (GW) of transmitted electricity, helping to drive the state's energy transition.

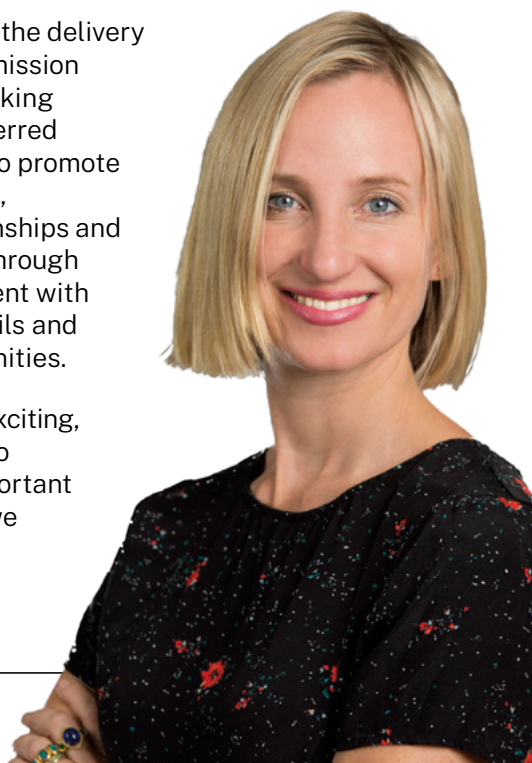
We are delivering on our commitment to engaging and supporting the communities we work with. This year we hosted workshops to identify local priorities that helped shape the Community and Employment Benefit Program, which launched in the Central-West Orana REZ in July.

The local community will receive \$128 million over the next four years, with an initial \$70 million now available to community groups, councils and First Nations organisations.

We also supported communities applying for funds through free grant-writing workshops, ensuring local and Aboriginal stakeholders can fully benefit from the opportunities created by the REZ.

As we embark into the delivery stage of the transmission project, we are working alongside the preferred network operator to promote work opportunities, strengthen relationships and mitigate impacts through ongoing engagement with landowners, councils and Aboriginal communities.

The road ahead is exciting, and I look forward to continuing this important work together as we move into 2025.





Wellington Solar Farm



Exploring local vineyard



Burrundong Dam

2024 and beyond

Here's some of the key milestones accomplished this year and what's next.



Statutory milestones

- **March 2024:** Environmental Impact Statement Response to submissions report
- **March 2024:** Environmental Impact Statement Amendment Report
- **June 2024:** NSW project approval
- **August 2024:** Commonwealth project approval
- **September 2024:** NSW Government grants transmission operator's licence



Consultations

- **February 2024:** Community and Employment Benefit Program
- **July 2024:** Launch of Community and Employment Benefit Program tranche 1
- **July 2024:** Industry forums briefings
- **November 2024:** RDA Orana Youth Forum
- **Late 2024:** Consultation on Social Impact Management Plan development



Next steps

- **Late 2024:** Network operator contract award
- **Early 2025:** Port to REZ project construction starts
- **Early 2025:** Transmission project construction starts
- **Late 2025:** Port to REZ project construction completion
- **From 2028:** Transmission project commissioning

Major milestones



Response to Submissions and Amendment Report

Following the exhibition of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in late 2023, more than 400 submissions were received.

EnergyCo reviewed these and prepared a Response to Submissions and Amendment Report published in March 2024.

The report is available on the NSW Planning Portal planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/central-west-orana-rez-transmission



Transmission project green light

The Central-West Orana REZ transmission project secured full planning approval from the Commonwealth and NSW Government, making it the first REZ in Australia to reach this pivotal milestone. The construction of essential transmission infrastructure brings us closer to connecting large-scale solar, wind and energy storage projects to the electricity grid.

At its peak, the project will generate \$20 billion in private investment, support around 5,000 construction jobs and deliver \$3 billion in net benefits for NSW energy consumers.

Read the media release at energyco.nsw.gov.au/latest-updates



Wellington Solar Farm



Preferred network operator secured

ACERESZ, a consortium of ACCIONA, COBRA, and Endeavour Energy, was confirmed as the preferred network operator in December 2023. Final contracts are expected to be awarded and construction is set to begin in early 2025.



ACERESZ granted transmission operator's licence

We are one step closer to delivering electricity into the grid after ACERESZ was granted a transmission operator's licence for the Central-West Orana REZ transmission system. The licence, granted by the Minister for Energy in September 2024, will enable ACERESZ to design, construct, own and operate the Central-West Orana REZ transmission system.



Biodiversity offsets

We are balancing energy development with strategic conservation by securing Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements (BSA) across the community, protecting crucial ecosystems like Box-Gum Woodland and threatened habitats such as the Regent Honeyeater.

Two large properties adjoining Capertee and Goulburn River national parks have been acquired, boosting conservation and ecological connectivity in the region.

We're building long-term land stewardship and promoting regional sustainability by collaborating with landholders and stakeholders.



Gulgong drop-in with participant



Gulgong



Community and Employment Benefit Program engagement, Cassilis

Building stronger communities

Thank you to those who submitted applications to receive funding under the Community and Employment Benefit Program (the Program) for the Central-West Orana REZ. Applications are being independently assessed by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Successful projects will be announced in early 2025.



Local Community Small Grants projects

This grant stream is designed to support small-scale events, initiatives or projects that deliver tangible benefits for residents, local organisations and First Nations communities in the REZ. The program will continue long after the REZs are delivered and will invest hundreds of millions of dollars into regional communities delivering lasting benefits. Learn more at energyco.nsw.gov.au/cebep

Engaging with you at each step

We could not have reached this milestone without the support and active engagement from our stakeholders and communities this year.



Identifying local priorities

In February and March, we worked with you to identify community priorities through a survey, targeted workshops and local information sessions, gathering feedback from over 300 people. Outcomes from this consultation helped refine the Program. Read the key findings on our website.



Launch of Community and Employment Benefit Program tranche 1

In July, the NSW Government launched the first tranche of the Community and Employment Benefit Program that will deliver an initial \$128 million to communities in the Central-West Orana REZ over the next four years. Under tranche 1, \$70 million in funding has been made available across four grant streams.



Workshops

To support the community in applying for grants and work packages, EnergyCo and ACERZ hosted free grant-writing workshops, attended by nearly 80 participants. Recordings are available online for those who missed the sessions.



Forum focuses on youth career paths

EnergyCo, in partnership with the preferred network operator for Central-West Orana REZ, ACERZ, was proud to sponsor the inaugural Regional Development Australia Orana Youth Forum in Dubbo on 6 November. The Youth Forum is an initiative aimed at equipping young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to start a future career in renewable energy. This collaboration highlighted a shared commitment to empowering the next generation in the Central-West Orana region.

Upskill for the energy transition

EnergyCo collaborated with TAFE NSW and industry partners to develop the 'Prepare to work in the renewable energy industry' microskills course, launched in November 2024. This introductory course is designed to boost local workforce skills by providing information on how to kick-start a career in clean energy.

Learn more about course at tafensw.edu.au/microskills



EnergyCo and ACERZ industry forum



Twelve Mile Road near Wellington

Boosting the region's economy

Investment surge

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) confirmed a \$490 million investment into the REZ through the Rewiring the Nation Fund. This landmark contribution will not only support the grid's development but also save NSW consumers an estimated \$240 million over the next 20 years.

Initial work packages released

Tenders for early work activities such as drainage, fencing, and other elements of construction for the transmission lines were announced in July. EnergyCo and ACERZ hosted 11 industry forums across the region, attended by about 300 participants from local businesses. These forums opened doors to tender opportunities, networking and business support across the region. More packages will be released over the next year. For more information, visit Gateway by Industry Capability Network (ICN) at gateway.icn.org.au



Community spotlight

This year, the Community Reference Group (CRG) welcomed new members to help guide the project's development. The 2024-2026 cohort were selected following an Expressions of Interest process.

We thank former CRG members for their contribution over the past two years. Their feedback has informed critical steps of the Central-West Orana REZ development.

Bev Smiles – Central West Environment Council and Wollar Progress Association

Bev has been involved in the CRG since 2022 and was re-appointed for the 2024-2026 term. Bev Smiles has lived and worked in the Central-West Orana region for more than 50 years.

As an environmentalist and a long-standing CRG member, she's been instrumental in advocating for community consultation and environmental protection. Her love for Wollar and Mudgee's scenic beauty drives her passion for a clean, sustainable future.

Bev values the knowledge-sharing and collaboration that comes with her CRG role, especially in shaping the Community and Employment Benefit Program and improving consultation with impacted communities.

Learn more about the 2024-2026 members on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community



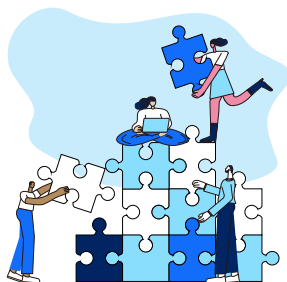
EnergyCo and ACERZ industry forum

In the community

The Central-West Orana REZ project team has been out and about attending a range of local shows, markets and field days this year.

2,954

Community and stakeholder Interactions

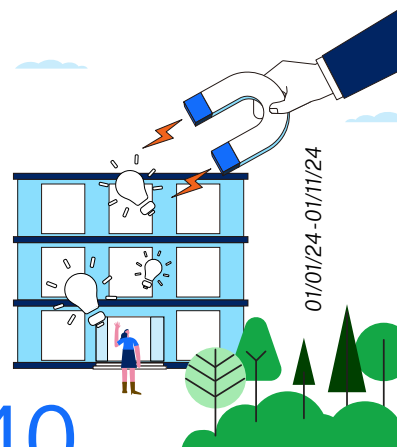


125

Meetings with landowners and organisations

48

Information sessions and pop-up events



40

Meetings with local councils

Engagement with Aboriginal communities

First Nations Coordination and Outcomes team

Our First Nations Coordination and Outcomes team has been working closely with Aboriginal communities to create training, employment, and economic opportunities within the REZ. The Central-West Orana Working Group continues to guide this engagement, and we were proud to support community events like the 52nd NSW Koori Knockout, a celebration of Aboriginal culture and athleticism.

Central-West Orana Working Group

The Central-West Orana Working Group continues to support local Aboriginal community engagement. They have been instrumental in developing the First Nations Guidelines for the Central-West Orana REZ and providing valuable feedback for the Community and Employment Benefit Program. We welcome Chair Tony Fuller, representing NSW Aboriginal Affairs and Co-Chair Tara Stanley, from Wellington LALC, appointed in August 2024. Register for updates about Aboriginal consultation opportunities by emailing us at cwo@energyco.nsw.gov.au



Koori Knockout



Koori Knockout



Koori Knockout



The Summit Awards and Gala Dinner

* Image credit: Aboriginal People and Culture | Office of Secretary Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure



Mudjee Small Farm Day



Dubbo Show



First CRG with 2024-2026 cohort



Dubbo drop in with participant

Connecting with community

Community Reference Group

The first meeting of the 2024-2026 Community Reference Group was held in Dubbo on July 23, 2024. We thank all who attended, including:

- Miranda Wood, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement for ACERZ
- Kee Li, Community and Stakeholder Engagement Manager for ACJV D&C
- David Thorne, NSW Farmers (Mudgee)
- Tim Booth, Mudgee Region Tourism
- Beverley Smiles, Central West Environment Council
- David Walker, Burrendong Botanic Garden & Arboretum
- Jock Rice-Ward, Community Representative
- Neville Mattick, RE-Alliance
- Trevor Armstrong, Chief Executive Officer of ACERZ
- Lisa Andrews, Independent Chair

We appreciate the contributions of all attendees.

Mudgee Small Farm Day

EnergyCo hosted a stall and chatted to community members attending the Mudgee Small Farm Day held from 12-13 July 2024.

Community and Employment Benefit Program drop-ins

To help design a program that reflected community priorities, we held eight drop-in sessions across the region during February and March this year.

Dubbo Show

EnergyCo hosted a stall at the Dubbo Show held from 10-12 May 2024. Sharing information with local community members about the transmission project.

Indigenous Business Summit 2024

EnergyCo celebrated Aboriginal business excellence at the Indigenous Business Summit in the Hunter during November 2024. We spoke to representatives from a diverse range of Aboriginal businesses, including law firms, employment consultants, contractors, and artists at the tradeshow.



Expansion of mental health support in the REZ

All community members in the Central-West Orana REZ can now access free and confidential support by calling an independent support line, available 24 hours a day and seven days a week on 1300 089 551.

Port to REZ

We are working with Transport for NSW to upgrade road intersections and pinch-points between the Port of Newcastle and the Central-West Orana REZ and Hunter-Central Coast REZ.

Detailed maps have been released showing the 19 highway upgrades along this route. These improvements will allow oversized over mass vehicles to transport heavy renewable energy components. This includes wind turbine components and transformers needed for generation and transmission infrastructure.

The upgrades are funded by the NSW and Australian Governments and are expected to begin in early 2025. Learn more about the Port to REZ project on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/port2rez

How to get involved

Follow the QR code or visit energyco.nsw.gov.au/contact

We value your input and look forward to keeping you informed as this project progresses.



Scan the QR code to sign up for updates.

Holiday closedown

In line with the NSW Government's Christmas closedown period, most project activities for the Central-West Orana REZ will pause from 5pm on Friday 20 December 2024 until Sunday 5 January 2025.

There will be no field work carried out during this period, except where emergency or time critical works are required. We will resume our activities from Monday 6 January 2025.



Next steps

Construction activity for the delivery of transmission infrastructure is set to begin, with upgrades to transport routes and site establishment starting early next year. Announcements of successful projects under various funding streams of the Community and Employment Benefit Program will continue into 2026. Our ongoing consultation with impacted landowners will continue to ensure a collaborative and transparent approach as the project progresses.

Contact us

EnergyCo wants to hear what you think about our plans. If you have questions or want to give feedback, please get in touch with our team.



cwo@energyco.nsw.gov.au



1800 032 101 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)



energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo



Scan the QR code for more information.



If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450** and ask them to call us on **1800 061 114**.