EnergyCo

# Anthrax management and biosecurity

## New England Renewable Energy Zone

April 2026

EnergyCo recognises anthrax is a serious biosecurity concern for farmers. We are working with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and anthrax specialists to assess and manage any potential risks appropriately.

## Overview

Construction and operation of the New England REZ network infrastructure project will be undertaken in line with expert advice and NSW Government requirements, including the DPIRD anthrax management procedures, as well as other best practice biosecurity and environmental management measures.

We use established practices for managing biosecurity, health and environmental risks during our investigative work and earthworks for construction activities.

This fact sheet outlines our planning to avoid and reduce biosecurity risk from anthrax affected soil in the project area during construction and operation of the REZ.

## Anthrax risk assessment and management strategy

EnergyCo is developing an anthrax risk assessment and management strategy which will provide a detailed analysis of the potential risks, as well as measures that will be applied to prevent the spread of anthrax spores.

The strategy forms part of the project's environmental impact statement (EIS) which will be lodged with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure for assessment and public exhibition in the second half of 2026.

## Statement from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)

*"Anthrax-affected soil requires careful management. However, experience in NSW and across Australia shows that farming and construction activities can continue safely in areas with a history of anthrax when they are supported by established biosecurity and risk management procedures.*

*"These measures focus on avoiding disturbance of known contaminated sites where practicable, managing soil movement, applying hygiene and equipment controls, responding quickly and effectively if a suspected case is identified, and vaccinating livestock. When such controls are applied, biosecurity risks can be effectively minimised."*

# Background

Anthrax spores occur naturally in some soils in parts of Australia. Some transmission infrastructure for the New England REZ is proposed in the Rouchel area in the Upper Hunter region where historical anthrax outbreaks have been recorded.

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, which can form resistant spores that persist in soil. Anthrax in Australia primarily affects grazing livestock and can occur where animals are exposed to contaminated soil, including in areas where soil has been disturbed.

When an infected animal dies, spores can enter the surrounding soil as the carcass decomposes. These spores can remain in soil for extended periods.

In NSW, it is not unusual for cases of anthrax to be diagnosed on farms. These are generally in areas west of the Great Dividing Range.

Agricultural activities continue safely in areas where anthrax affected soil is present, supported by established biosecurity controls.

We are conducting a scientific risk assessment to assess anthrax risks during construction. We will design appropriate risk mitigation strategies if risks are detected. However, we expect the risk of anthrax being encountered and spread during construction activities is low.

The project will be built using established protocols to manage this risk. We are aware of historical burial locations and are planning our investigation and construction work to avoid these areas, where practicable.

# What does construction involve and how does this relate to anthrax management?

Key activities for the REZ network infrastructure project will include:

- investigative work, including drilling bore holes to understand geotechnical conditions
- preparation of access tracks which may involve excavation work
- building tower foundations and footings which are typically spaced 400-500m apart, giving us flexibility to avoid known contaminated sites (carcasses).

We will consider anthrax risk when planning these activities and designing project infrastructure, and we will use biosecurity protocols when carrying out the work.

# How we manage the risk of anthrax

Anthrax risk can be effectively managed through established biosecurity controls, including avoiding disturbance of known sites and/or implementing appropriate hygiene measures, exclusion zones, soil management and vaccinating livestock in known risk areas.

We will implement precautionary measures to minimise anthrax risk on farms. Strict biosecurity protocols will be in place during construction activities, such as earthworks, to prevent exposure and manage contaminated sites safely. These may include:

- avoiding disturbance of any known contaminated sites where practicable
- adherence to biosecurity measures already in place on the site
- avoiding the uncontrolled movement of soil between properties
- soil testing in identified high risk areas during construction work

- cleaning and decontaminating equipment, machinery and vehicles
- implementing personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene measures
- supporting landholders with livestock vaccination programs
- taking extra precaution during excessive rainfall events following drought, which has been linked to historical outbreaks
- enhanced surveillance through education of primary producers, veterinarians and doctors during construction.

DPIRD sets the animal biosecurity management procedures for anthrax and other biosecurity risks in NSW. We are working closely with DPIRD as we develop our environmental assessments for the project, including a detailed assessment of potential anthrax risks and management measures.

## If anthrax is found on a property

It's important to note that anthrax spores in soil pose a low risk when left undisturbed. In areas with a known history of anthrax, we will take additional precautions during project investigations and construction.

This includes working closely with landholders to develop property-specific risk management strategies and biosecurity protocols.

In the unlikely event that suspect material or animal remains are found on a property, work in the area will immediately stop, a temporary exclusion zone would be established, and relevant authorities would be notified. An investigation would then be carried out in accordance with DPIRD's Anthrax Management Procedure.

The investigation typically involves prompt reporting and diagnosis, followed by:

- quarantine, disposal of carcasses and decontamination
- vaccination and/or treatment (usually antibiotics) of at-risk livestock
- investigation and tracing (including livestock products)
- continued monitoring, regular vaccination, public awareness and data recording.

Work would only recommence once the area has been assessed and confirmed safe.

The network operator for the New England REZ network infrastructure project will develop comprehensive emergency and biosecurity management plans for construction and operation of the REZ.

These plans will include procedures for managing soil disturbance and protecting workers, landholders and the community.

## What about human health?

Humans can become exposed to anthrax through handling infected animals or carcasses, or through contact with contaminated soil or animal products. With appropriate procedures and mitigations in place, human infections are very rare.

Only three human cases have been reported in NSW since 1991 (source: health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/anthrax-contacts.aspx); all of these cases occurred in South West NSW. While the risk to human health is very low, we are taking it seriously.

The anthrax risk assessment and management strategy in the EIS will consider potential risks to human health and outline measures to protect landholders, farms and the community.

## More information

More information on how we will manage anthrax risk during construction will be included in the project's EIS, which we expect to lodge with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure for public exhibition in the second half of 2026.

For more information on anthrax and livestock management, view the NSW Government's Emergency Animal Disease webpage at dpi.nsw.gov.au/dpi/biosecurity/animal-biosecurity/animal-diseases-of-concern-for-nsw2/anthrax.

For more information on anthrax as it relates to human health, view NSW Health's anthrax fact sheet at health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Anthrax.aspx.

Scan to visit the Emergency Animal Disease webpage.

## About EnergyCo

The Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) is a statutory authority responsible for leading the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) as part of the NSW Government's Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

EnergyCo is working closely with communities, investors and industry to deliver the state's first five REZs.

For more information about EnergyCo, visit our website at **energyco.nsw.gov.au/about-us**.

## Contact us

For more information, please visit our website or get in touch with our team.

nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au

1800 061 114
(9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

energyco.nsw.gov.au/nerez

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## Share your feedback

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. You can find more information on our website by scanning the QR code or by visiting **energyco.nsw.gov.au/nerez**.