

Aboriginal Guidelines: New England REZ

Guidance on priorities identified by Aboriginal communities in New England to increase employment and income opportunities from electricity infrastructure projects under the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap



Acknowledgement of Country



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

Aboriginal Guidelines: New England REZ

Published by NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

energy.nsw.gov.au

First published: October 2026

ISBN: 978-1-76186-176-5

Copyright and disclaimer

© State of New South Wales through Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water 2026. Information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, March 2026, and is subject to change. For more information, please visit the following websites:

www.energy.nsw.gov.au/copyright

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/about-us/copyright-and-disclaimer

www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/copyright

Contents

Minister's Foreword	2
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose of the Guidelines	5
1.2 Review	5
2 Guiding principles	6
3 Priorities	7
3.1 Country and Culture is protected through early and respectful engagement	9
3.2 Governance and involvement in decision making	10
3.3 Employment	12
3.4 Business development, procurement of goods and services	14
3.5 Training	16
3.6 Benefit sharing arrangements	17
3.7 Ownership and equity	18
4 The New England REZ Aboriginal communities and organisations	19
4.1 Local Aboriginal Land Councils	19
4.2 Traditional Owners with Native Title rights and interests	20
4.3 Other relevant Aboriginal organisations	20
5 Appendices	21
5.1 Key milestones for year 1 (Q2 2026 – Q1 2027)	21
5.2 Relevant organisations and groups within New England	22
5.2.1 New England REZ organisations and businesses	22
5.2.2 State-wide organisations	22
5.2.3 Government agencies and entities	22
5.3 Glossary	23
5.4 Relevant section of the EII Act and other legislation	26
5.4.1 Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 key sections	26
5.4.2 Other relevant legislation	27

Minister's Foreword



I recognise the Traditional Owners of the lands across NSW and pay my respect to Elders past and present. I acknowledge the many Aboriginal clans and language groups across NSW, and their continued connection to their land, waters, skies and communities.

I am pleased to present the Aboriginal Guidelines for the New England Renewable Energy Zone (the Guidelines).

NSW's clean energy transformation is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that requires significant investment in new transmission and clean energy infrastructure. New England has some of the best natural energy resources across Australia and the New England Renewable Energy Zone is expected to attract up to \$24 billion dollars in private investment. The NSW Government wants to ensure that the Aboriginal people of the New England Renewable Energy Zone are an integral part of, and achieve long-term benefits, from this investment.

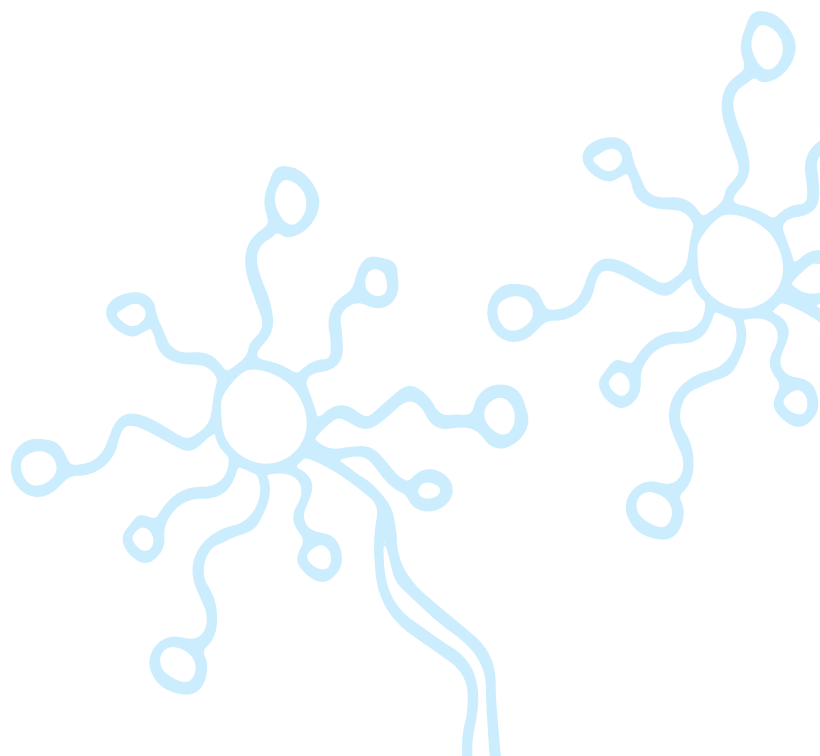
The Aboriginal people and organisations involved in developing the Guidelines recognise that the New England Renewable Energy Zone will operate over many years. Given this, they expect respectful engagement underpinned by culture and cultural authority, strong governance, sustained employment, enduring income streams, and genuine equity participation. To support these outcomes, the Guidelines outline the priorities of New England Aboriginal people and communities across three horizons: long-term goals; overarching priorities; and early years' activities. Each priority sets out a pathway that goes beyond short-term outcomes and seeks to bring lasting economic benefits for Aboriginal communities within the New England Renewable Energy Zone.

My sincere thanks to the Aboriginal communities and organisations who participated in the development of the Guidelines.

I look forward to seeing each of the priorities actioned.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC

Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Heritage



1 Introduction

The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (the Roadmap) is the state's 20-year plan to power NSW with affordable, clean and reliable energy for everyone. Working with communities, industry and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the NSW Government is leading a once-in-a-generation upgrade of the NSW electricity network.



The Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 (NSW) (EII Act) gives effect to the Roadmap and includes specific objects relating to Aboriginal communities to:

- increase employment and income opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW
- promote consultation and negotiation with the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which generation, storage and network infrastructure is proposed to be constructed or operated under this Act.

Section 4 of the EII Act requires the Minister to publish guidelines to enable delivery of these objects.¹

The Guidelines reflect months of engagement with local Aboriginal people across the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), including Native Title applicants, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal community members. They capture the priorities and expectations as development progresses across the New England REZ and will provide clarity and consistency.

¹ [Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 No 44 NSW legislation – section 4](#) requires the Minister to issue guidelines about consultation and negotiation with the local Aboriginal community in relation to relevant projects for the purposes of increasing employment and income opportunities for the local Aboriginal community. The New England Guidelines are supported by the First Nations Guidelines for the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap which applies statewide.

All developers—including those involved with generation, storage and network infrastructure—are encouraged to apply these priorities and expectations in shaping project planning, decision-making and engagement with Aboriginal communities.

The Minister, Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) as the Infrastructure Planner and AusEnergy Services Ltd (ASL) as the Consumer Trustee must take the Guidelines into account when exercising certain functions under the EII Act and the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Regulation 2021* (NSW).² The Minister and EnergyCo may impose conditions on developers to give effect to the Guidelines. This document provides actionable guidance on how the Minister, EnergyCo and ASL should take the Guidelines into account to ensure they are increasing employment and income opportunities for Aboriginal people in and around the New England REZ.

The principles, goals and priority actions articulated in these Guidelines are intended to shape and drive coordination and planning, and to inform monitoring across Roadmap entities, government agencies and developers of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.



² See the [First Nations Guidelines for the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap](#) for more detail on how each entity must take the Guidelines into account.

1.1 Purpose of the Guidelines

The Guidelines outline the expectations of the Aboriginal communities in the New England REZ and the Minister about how developers of renewable energy and network infrastructure plan, engage and negotiate for delivery of benefits that will transform employment and income opportunities of Aboriginal communities in and around the New England REZ over the next 30 years.

It also provides guidance to Roadmap entities and relevant government agencies on coordination, conducting tenders, monitoring and reporting as well as delivering supporting and ancillary capacity and enabling services.

Importantly, these Guidelines do not replace other obligations to consult with Aboriginal people and communities under NSW and Commonwealth legislation concerning cultural heritage, environment, social, or other impacts of proposals.

All NSW Government-led engagement across the New England REZ must uphold the rights affirmed in the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW) and enact the transformative commitments of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including shared decision-making. Where required, parties should seek their own independent legal advice.

Alignment with National Agreement on Closing the Gap

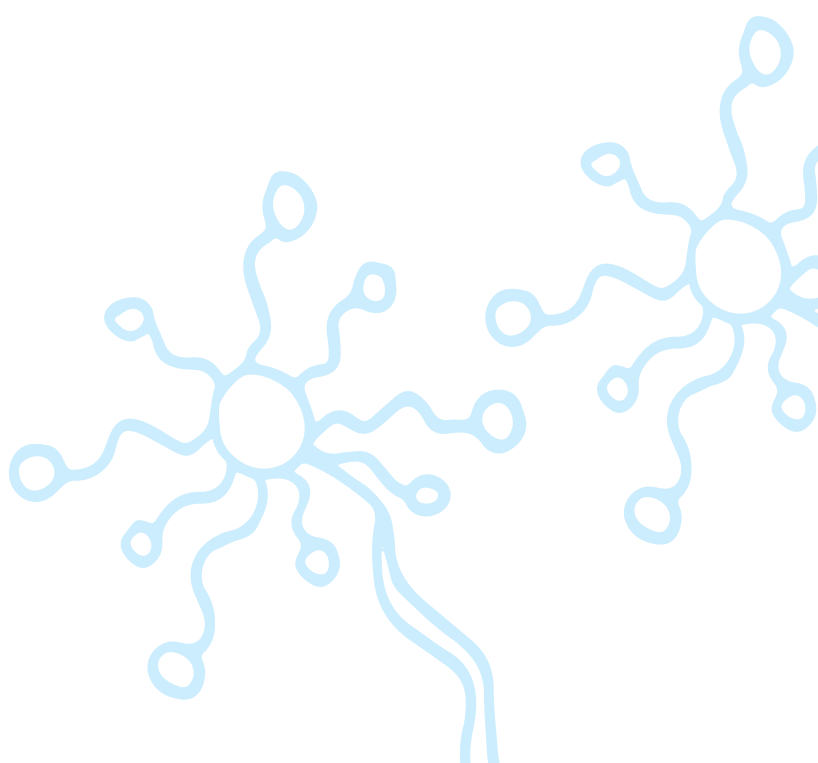
The Guidelines contribute to advancing priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by fostering genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in electricity infrastructure projects; strengthening the community-controlled sector through priority initiatives that create income and employment opportunities; and promoting economic prosperity and business growth for Aboriginal communities through the clean energy transition.

There is specific alignment with following Closing the Gap (CTG) Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- **5** students achieve their full learning potential
- **7** youth are engaged in employment or education
- **8** strong economic participation and development of people and their communities
- **15** people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters
- **17** people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives

1.2 Review

The Minister will review the Guidelines at least every 2 years and amend them in consultation with the local Aboriginal communities in and around the New England REZ to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate.



2 Guiding principles

The following principles guide all parties to ensure the Guidelines are used effectively and achieve their intended impact:

1. Cultural authority and Country-centred engagement and decision-making

All parties must understand and respect appropriate cultural authority when undertaking engagement and decision making throughout the project lifecycle. The engagement must be early and genuine, in alignment with the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). A Country-centred approach is a way of working that places Aboriginal culture and cultural landscapes at the centre of decision-making, design and practice.

(CTG Outcome 15)

2. Strong coordination

All parties must proactively work together across all stages of planning, procurement and delivery to ensure an integrated and aligned approach. Coordination between developers, government agencies and Aboriginal communities is essential to maximise impact, share resources and prevent duplication of effort.

(CTG Outcome 8)

3. Communication and flow of information

Transparent, timely and culturally appropriate communication will underpin all engagement. Aboriginal communities and right-holders must have access to clear, consistent and relevant information to support informed participation in decision making.

(CTG Outcome 17)

4. Strong accountability, monitoring and reporting

All parties are accountable for their commitments and performance. The Department will ensure regular monitoring and transparent reporting. Shared learning will drive continuous improvement and ensure better outcomes.

(CTG Outcome 17)

5. New England REZ Aboriginal Working Group(s)

These group(s) will serve as a respected partner, grounded in –and respectful of– recognised cultural authority and local decision-making processes (including and not limited to Native Title, Land Rights and place-based partnerships). The Working Groups are not a decision-making authority and aims to support and strengthen community voices and is accountable first and foremost to community. The Working Groups will be formed after the Guidelines are published.

(CTG Outcome 17)

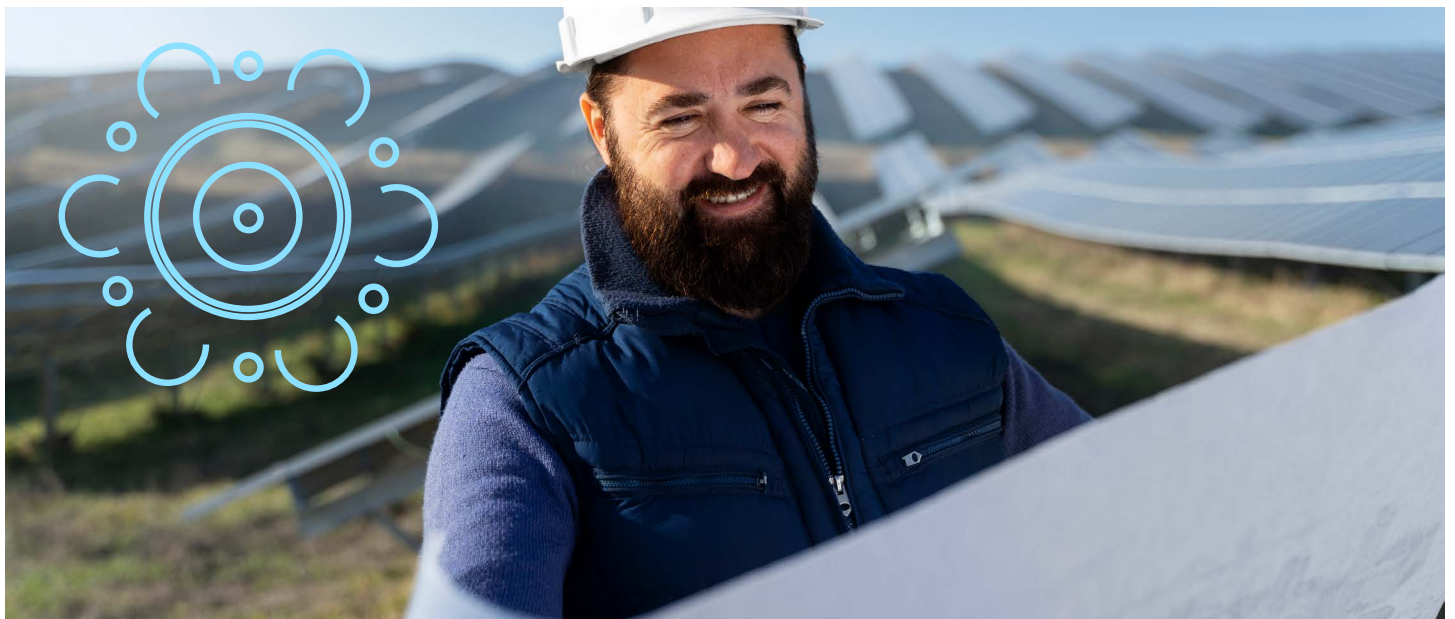
6. Whole-of-government alignment

Programs such as regional development, training, business support and cultural heritage management are aligned with the Guidelines to strengthen delivery, reduce duplication and create a connected system of support that enables sustained Aboriginal participation and benefit.

(CTG Outcomes 5 & 7)

3 Priorities

The New England REZ network infrastructure (transmission and distribution) will be developed progressively over many years, alongside the wind, solar and storage projects that will connect to it. Together, the New England REZ, its network operator and participating projects are expected to operate for up to 30 years.



Given this long operating life, infrastructure developers are expected to plan for and deliver sustained employment, enduring income streams, and genuine equity participation for Aboriginal communities over the life of the REZ. Roadmap entities and relevant government agencies have a critical role in enabling these outcomes through strong coordination, active partnership brokering, and firm accountability for the commitments that are made.

To support this shared task, the Guidelines clearly set out the priorities of the New England REZ for Aboriginal communities across 3 time horizons:

1. Long-term goals (>10 years)

2. Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

3. Priority initiatives (years 1–3).

New England REZ developers: all renewable energy developers within New England REZ that have a Long-Term Energy Service Agreement, Access Right and/or Access Scheme. It also includes network operator building the New England REZ network infrastructure.

Community focus priorities



Country and Culture is protected through early and respectful engagement

All renewable energy and network infrastructure project developments and related Government activities in the New England REZ are conducted with a Country-centred approach.



Governance and involvement in decision making

Proactive partnerships with Aboriginal communities in governance and decision making throughout the lifecycle of a renewable energy project.



Employment

Increase the level and type of employment within Aboriginal communities and reduce percentage of people not in the labour force



Business development, procurement of goods and services

Increase income opportunities and grow the number of Aboriginal businesses in the New England REZ.



Training

Design and delivery of training pathways linked with employment opportunities across degree level, trades and certificates in renewable energy and adjacent industries to create a pipeline of skilled workers over the 30-year horizon of the New England REZ.



Benefit sharing arrangements

Increase income opportunities and grow the number of Aboriginal businesses in the New England REZ.



Ownership and equity

Increased ownership and equity stakes in renewable energy projects to build more long-term economic and social benefits through ongoing income streams and influence.

3.1 Country and Culture is protected through early and respectful engagement



(CTG Outcome: 15)

Long-term goal (>10 years)

All renewable energy and network infrastructure project developments and related Government activities in the New England REZ are conducted with a Country-centred approach.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Traditional Owners must be actively involved in project decisions relating to impacts and ongoing management of Country and cultural heritage.
- Engagement and consultation reflect and respect cultural authority, value relationships and cultural protocols and decision making is grounded in connection and community.
- All engagement with Aboriginal communities is underpinned by the principles of FPIC.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
Developers and EPCs	3.1.1 Ensure that all key project staff have completed appropriate cultural awareness training within 3 months of joining the project.
	3.1.2 For projects in the planning and development phase, engage early with Aboriginal communities – particularly those with cultural authority – to design the infrastructure around the cultural values and landscape.
New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups	3.1.3 Develop engagement arrangements between the New England REZ Working Groups and Aboriginal communities to ensure cultural authority is respected and legitimate community governance processes are upheld.

Case study – WestWind Energy - Respectful engagement valuing cultural heritage - VIC

Warracknabeal Energy Park is located on the unceded lands of the Wotjobaluk Nation, with Traditional Owners represented by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC). Over the past two years, WestWind has been meeting with the Traditional Owners several times each month to build relationships, share project updates, and ensure their perspectives are fully considered. Tangible cultural heritage values have been assessed across the project site, with Aboriginal Places expected to be registered through the Cultural Heritage Management Plan. WestWind also recognise the potential impact on intangible cultural heritage values – such as changes to the visual landscape and areas connected to traditional Wotjobaluk stories and oral histories. These will be assessed through a Cultural Values Assessment (CVA). The CVA will map and record intangible values to deepen understanding and provide a valuable resource for both Traditional Owners and the project. BGLC has expressed a preference for this cultural mapping approach over a conventional report.

Westwind Energy Development

3.2 Governance and involvement in decision making



(CTG Outcome: 17)

Long-term goal (>10 years)

Proactive partnerships with Aboriginal communities in governance and decision making throughout the lifecycle of a renewable energy project.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Embed an Aboriginal-centred framework into the design and evaluation of relevant government initiatives and programs in alignment with NSW First Nations Investment Framework.
- Establish a consistent First Nations Data Sovereignty and Transparency model across New England REZ projects to ensure that the data to measure community-defined outcomes will be collected, accessed and analysed in a timely, transparent and culturally responsive manner.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
DCCEEW with EnergyCo	3.2.1 Establish 2 New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups (representing northern and southern areas of the REZ) to provide advice on New England REZ matters, including design and implementation of activities relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage management.
EnergyCo	3.2.2 Consult with the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups before developing and launching the New England Community Employment and Benefit Program (CEBP). The purpose of this consultation will be to ensure that the CEBP is aligned with the priorities and goals articulated in the Guidelines, particularly enabling long-term employment and economic opportunities that lead to sustained community benefits.
	3.2.3 Include Aboriginal people in assessment of any grant or similar programs targeting Aboriginal communities.
	3.2.4 Facilitate negotiation between the preferred network operator, developers and New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups and ensure their Industry and Aboriginal Participation Plans (IAPPs) are aligned to these Guidelines and include measures that contribute to long-term economic and employment outcomes.
	3.2.5 Incorporate the priority initiatives outlined in these Guidelines into the tender assessment for access rights.
	3.2.6 Initiate a gathering of potential project developers, relevant government agencies and community representatives within 3 months of these Guidelines being signed to set expectations, enable sharing of information and better coordination between all stakeholders creating an open channel for more meaningful partnerships.
	3.2.7 Incorporate the goals and priorities related to employment, business development, procurement, training, social and community benefits and ownership and equity into the allocation process for REZ Access Rights.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
DCCEEW	3.2.8 Develop a transparent monitoring and reporting framework to track progress on the goals outlined in these Guidelines.
	3.2.9 Identify and support demonstration projects and partnerships to address identified implementation barriers and connect programs to maximise outcomes.
	3.2.10 Explore models for coordination between project developers' commitments to achieve more sustained and long-term results.
ASL	3.2.11 Incorporate the goals and priorities related to employment, business development, procurement, training, social and community benefits and ownership and equity into the tender assessment for Long-Term Energy Service Agreements (LTESAs).
SFV	3.2.12 Support DCCEEW to develop a reporting mechanism to share progress on the Aboriginal participation commitments made by LTES Operators to the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups.
Developers	3.2.13 Designate a staff member for engagement and coordination or preferably employ a local Aboriginal coordinator and provide details to the EnergyCo Outcomes Team and the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups.

Case study – Mari Ngali Agreement Tamworth

In a historic agreement in May 2025, Tamworth became the first local council to sign a formal partnership with an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to work together on Closing the Gap. It is hoped that the place-based partnership will inspire other communities looking to take action to Close the Gap on a local level through Aboriginal-led solutions. It provides a framework for self-determination and shared decision making for Aboriginal communities and organisations in Tamworth.

[Tamworth Aboriginal community organisations unite to close the gap on a local level | NSW Government](#)

3.3 Employment

(CTG Outcomes 5 & 7)



Long-term goal (>10 years)

Increase the level and type of employment within Aboriginal communities and reduce percentage of people not in the labour force (compared to 2021 census, see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Aboriginal people not in the labour force, ABS Census 2021

	New England REZ	New South Wales	Australia
% of Aboriginal people not in the labour force	49.5%	42.0%	44.2%

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Build sustained employment by focusing on trade apprentice positions (including plumbing, windfarm technicians, electricians, HVAC refrigeration), traineeships, (including administration, community engagement) and university scholarships.
- Develop programs to increase the volume of entry level opportunities that require short-term training to support Aboriginal people who are unemployed or out of the labour force.
- Encourage employment of local Aboriginal community members within the New England REZ in collaboration with local employment agencies where possible, rather than relocating people.

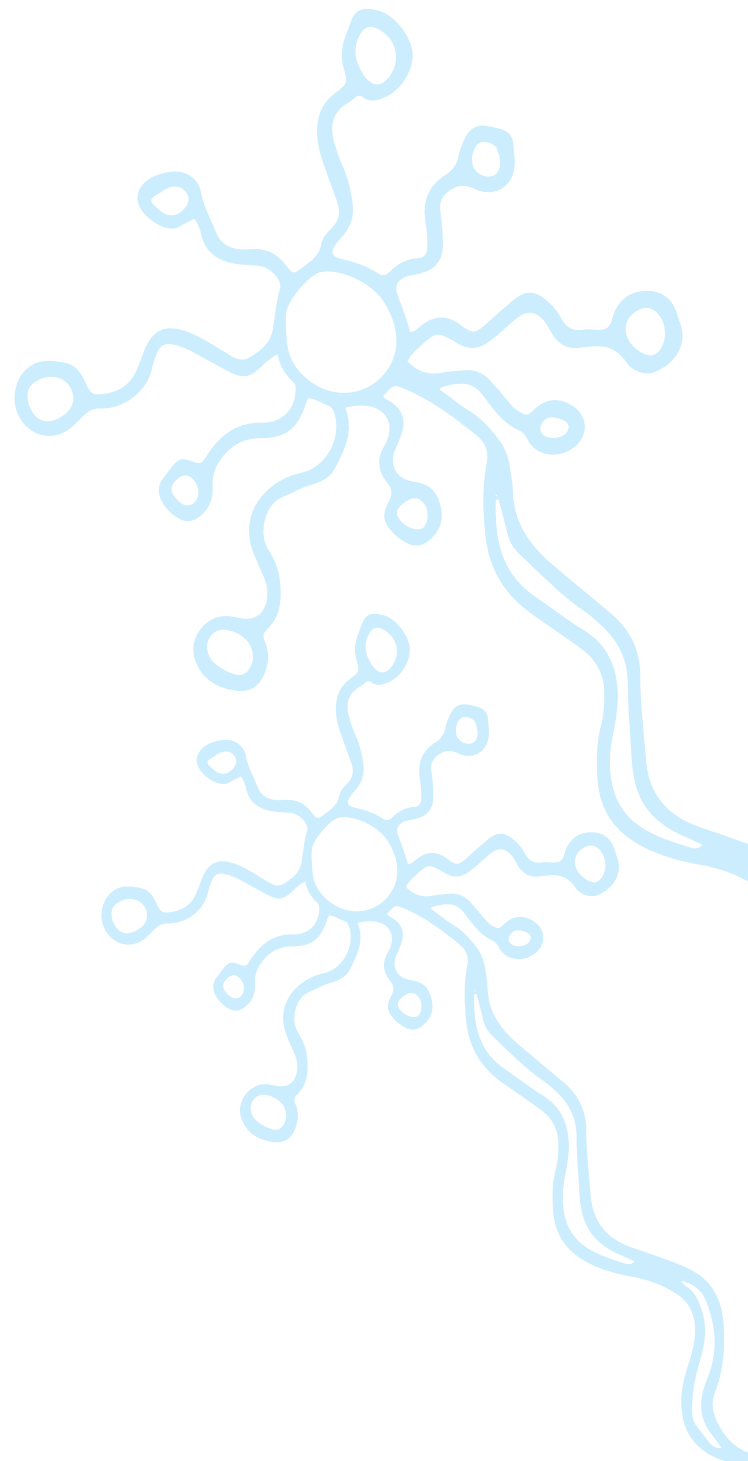
Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
EnergyCo	3.3.1 Support design and implementation of workforce readiness programs, that align with project developers, engineering procurement and construction (EPC) firms workforce needs.
	3.3.2 Facilitate connections among access right holders to allow movement of trained local workers between projects.
DCCEEW	3.3.3 Explore models for wraparound services to access and maintain long-term employment.
Developers and EPC firms	3.3.4 Fund apprenticeships in various trades in own organisations, labour hire companies or require inclusion in subcontracts.
	3.3.5 Ensure Aboriginal employment targets flow through to EPC and lower-level contracts.
	3.3.6 Establish wraparound support such as free bus services to worksites and provide basic safety supplies for loan.
	3.3.7 Utilise New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups and local networks to share job opportunities.

Case study – AGL’s Liddell Battery Energy Storage System creating employment – NSW

AGL and Fluence, a Tier 1 energy supplier, have partnered with Black Rock’s ‘Second Chance for Change Program’, providing incarcerated First Nations individuals with opportunities to participate, develop skills and prepare for workforce reintegration. This initiative fosters dignity, purpose and long-term opportunities, while building industry awareness on the benefits of engaging First Nations businesses.

AGL is actively seeking First Nations employees and contractors to participate in recognised and respected energy industry apprenticeship and traineeship programs, providing structured pathways into long-term employment and skills development. This includes advertising of targeted Indigenous apprenticeship and traineeship roles via the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce (NSW ICC) **Cooee Opportunities** newsletter.



3.4 Business development, procurement of goods and services



(CTG Outcome 8)

Long-term goal (>10 years)

Increase income opportunities and grow the number of Aboriginal businesses in the New England REZ.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Investment to support Aboriginal businesses bid for renewable energy project tenders.
- Support development of new businesses, for example, offset management, construction, cleaning, solar farm maintenance and traffic management.
- Values-led economic development, such as cultural tourism and hospitality that reflect a strong commitment to self-determination and long-term community-led growth and success.
- Procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal-owned businesses on an 'if not, why not' basis.

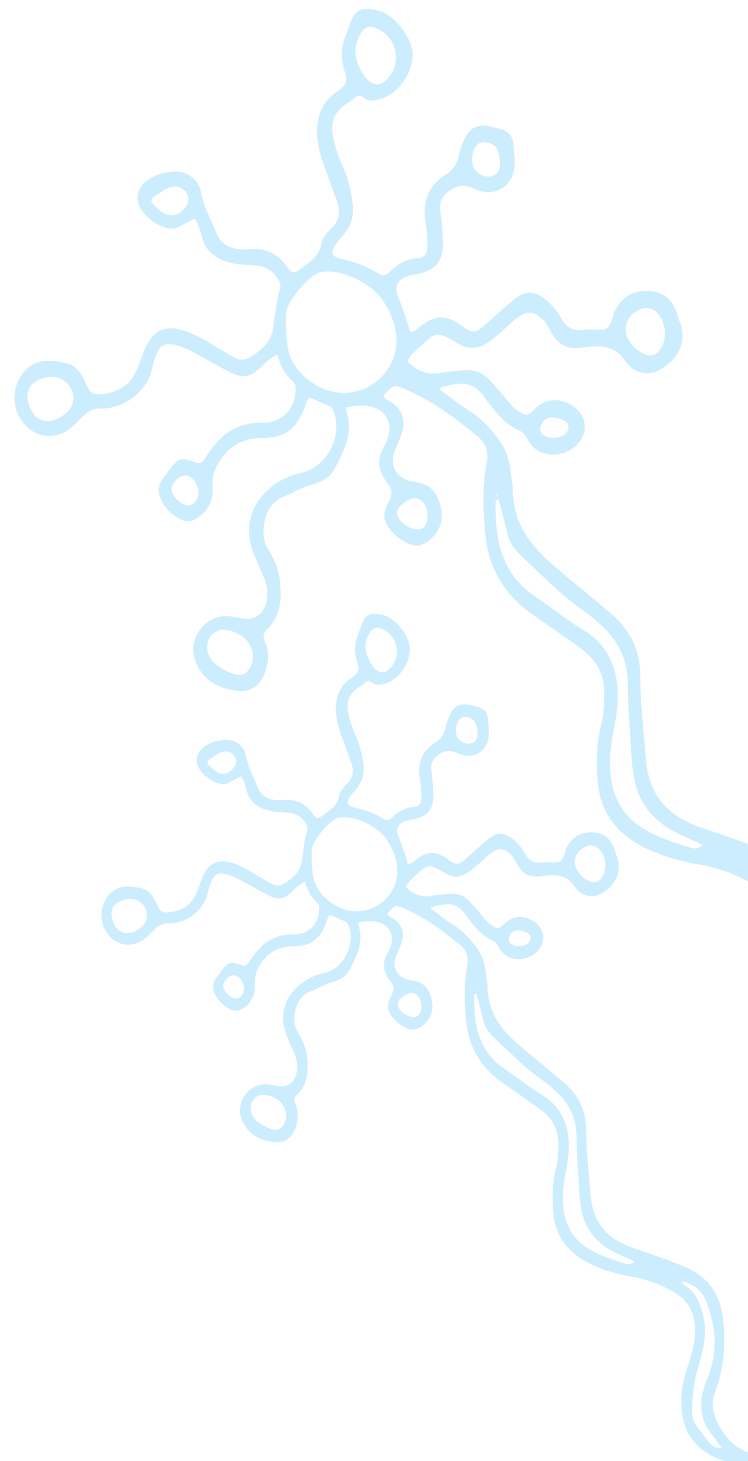
Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
EnergyCo	3.4.1 Broker engagement with relevant government agencies, renewable energy project developers, EPC firms and Aboriginal businesses to establish commitments and relationships on procuring goods and services.
	3.4.2 Run targeted tendering and procurement capability programs for Aboriginal businesses in the New England REZ area.
Developers and EPCs	3.4.3 Identify procurement opportunities early and notify First Nations Outcomes team in EnergyCo and New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups.
	3.4.4 Set up shopfronts or offices in Aboriginal owned spaces.
	3.4.5 Consider funding purchase of key equipment or machinery that increases a business' ability to bid for contracts.
	3.4.6 Proactively identify opportunities to collaborate with others in the REZ to invest in business development programs.
	3.4.7 Build relationships with Aboriginal business chambers, local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) and community organisations to support Aboriginal business capability development.
DCCEEW	3.4.8 Explore models and partnerships for the development of place based panels of Aboriginal businesses in relevant sectors to improve connection between Aboriginal businesses and developers and their subcontractors.
	3.4.9 Explore in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Treasury and Aboriginal Affairs extension of existing or innovative wraparound business development programs that can be run in the New England REZ.

Case study – Atmos Renewables Merredin BESS project supporting local economies – WA

Atmos Renewables formed a relationship with Njaki Njaki group and Ballardong Aboriginal Corporation to co-design economic opportunities for the Merredin BESS Project. The BESS project's Principal Contractor, Genus, developed custom work packages suitable for Merredin-based Aboriginal civil contractor Maarli Services. These work packages were valued at over \$3 million and provides employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people while supporting the expansion of their contracting business.

[atmos-services-limited_2025.pdf – page 13](#)



3.5 Training

(CTG Outcomes 5 & 7)



Long-term goal (>10 years)

Design and delivery of training pathways linked with employment opportunities across degree level, trades and certificates in renewable energy and adjacent industries to create a pipeline of skilled workers over the 30-year horizon of the New England REZ.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation-led programs that capture the interest of students, highlight the opportunities and create training pathways.
- Support implementation of Aboriginal cadetship programs in New England to increase successful transition for Aboriginal students from school to university, course completions, employment and career progression.
- Program and industry partnerships to create positions for Aboriginal trainers and reduce the wide shortage in the trainer workforce.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
EnergyCo/ DCCEEW	3.5.1 Broker agreement with project developers and employment services to fund and implement project specific pre-employment programs.
	3.5.2 Explore longer term programs and projects that increase pool of Aboriginal specific apprentices for developers and adjacent industries- and consider linking this to Access Right allocation process. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Appointment of REZ-wide group training organisations (preferably Aboriginal run or partnership with Aboriginal provider) to create a pool of apprentices. – leveraging existing programs such as the community connector program in Tamworth and Armidale to offer school-based programs and pathway to traineeships and apprenticeships
Developers and EPCs	3.5.3 Partner with the Aboriginal CareerTrackers program to connect Aboriginal university students with paid internships on renewable energy projects or within corporate operations.
	3.5.4 Increase demand for apprenticeship positions, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partner with youth organisations to fund apprenticeships in trades. – Provide incentives to subcontractors to employ more Aboriginal apprentices to increase demand
	3.5.5 Invest in heavy vehicle training for New England REZ Aboriginal community members, including driver training and licenscing.
Department of Education (enabling organisation)	3.5.6 Partner with DCCEEW and EnergyCo to improve awareness and understanding of jobs in renewable energy and training pathways into these jobs at school levels through partnerships with developers to facilitate site visits and outreach campaigns.

3.6 Benefit sharing arrangements



(CTG Outcomes 8 & 17)

Long-term goal (>10 years)

Systemically improve the economic wellbeing of local Aboriginal communities through sustainable benefit sharing agreements, where outcomes are self-determined by the community.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Long-term programs to improve energy affordability in local Aboriginal communities.
- Sustainable investment from electricity infrastructure projects into:
 - social support services for Elders, families with young children and young people that aim to improve their economic wellbeing
 - Aboriginal community organisations that offer wraparound training and employment services and support for local Aboriginal business development and capability-building.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
EnergyCo/ DCCEEW	3.6.1 Support the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups to develop cultural training packages to build developers' cultural competency and ensure cultural safety of Aboriginal employees and businesses working on the electricity infrastructure projects.
	3.6.2 Coordinate developers' benefit sharing initiatives to avoid duplication, reduce engagement fatigue and maximise outcomes through pooling and harnessing resources for greater impact.
Developers and EPCs	3.6.3 Develop and commit to an organisational Reconciliation Action Plan and embed this into the Industry and Aboriginal Participation Plans.
	3.6.4 Consider more direct benefits, for example an annual energy rebate to Aboriginal communities in certain radius of a project.
	3.6.5 Invest in local cultural competency training and ensure key workers attend local Aboriginal cultural trainings.
	3.6.6 Fund/sponsor local social support programs (for example, youth, aged and disability services) that also improve economic outcomes.

Case study – Squadron Power Promise Program

Aboriginal communities located near Stage 1 of the Clarke Creek Wind Farm in Queensland are part of Squadron's 'Power Promise Program'. This program is designed to deliver direct, energy-related benefits for communities near Squadron's future renewable energy projects. It is also designed to be flexible and community driven and the benefits for the area could include:

- electricity bill bonuses | subsidised rooftop solar panels | home batteries | energy efficiency upgrades | improved reliability | opportunities for community co-investment.

3.7 Ownership and equity



(CTG Outcomes 8 & 17)

Long-term goal (>10 years)

Increased ownership and equity stakes in renewable energy projects to build more long-term economic and social benefits through ongoing income streams and influence.

Overarching priorities (5–10 year outcomes)

- Encourage project developers to utilise Aboriginal-owned land for development activities under land use agreements.
- Government-led developments (for example, housing and storage facilities) to prioritise use of Aboriginal-owned land with land use agreements.
- Promote equity and revenue sharing agreements with renewable energy developers.

Priority initiatives (years 1–3)

Participant	Activities
DCCEEW	3.7.1 Develop and support an equity and revenue sharing model(s) that is sustainable and repeatable.
	3.7.2 Partner with relevant organisations to identify and implement programs to improve capacity and capability in Aboriginal communities to enter equity or revenue sharing agreements.
EnergyCo	3.7.3 Include shared-equity or revenue sharing in merit assessment of projects for Access Rights Allocation process.
ASL	3.7.4 Include shared-equity or revenue sharing in merit assessment of projects for LTESAs
Developers and EPCs	3.7.5 Use Aboriginal-owned land where possible to host renewable energy projects, workforce accommodation sites and other uses.
	3.7.6 Engage early with the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups to identify opportunities for equity or revenue sharing.
New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups	3.7.7 Invite the First Nations Clean Energy Network to implement the PowerMakers program to build capacity to participate in and own clean energy solutions.

4 The New England REZ Aboriginal communities and organisations

Since the Dreamtime, the Anaiwan, Bigambul, Dainggatti, Gomeroi, Gumbainggier, Kamilaroi and Ngarabal Nations have maintained a deep connection with their land, water and skies, which are central to their spiritual identity, despite the devastating impacts of colonisation and forced removal.



4.1 Local Aboriginal Land Councils

The following Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) boundaries fall within the New England REZ:

Moombahlene	Tamworth
Glen Innes	Thungutti
Anaiwan	Birpai
Armidale	Purfleet/Taree
Amaroo	Nungaroo

Developers and Roadmap entities should note that the LALC boundaries may not necessarily align with other native title, traditional or cultural connections to Country boundaries. Therefore, it is important that developers and Roadmap entities proactively engage with Traditional Owners and those with cultural authority in the New England REZ.

4.2 Traditional Owners with Native Title rights and interests

Parts of areas for determination under the following native title claims fall within the New England REZ:

Native title claim	Areas covered within the New England REZ
Gomerai People	Parts of Inverell, Uralla, Tamworth, Walcha Council areas

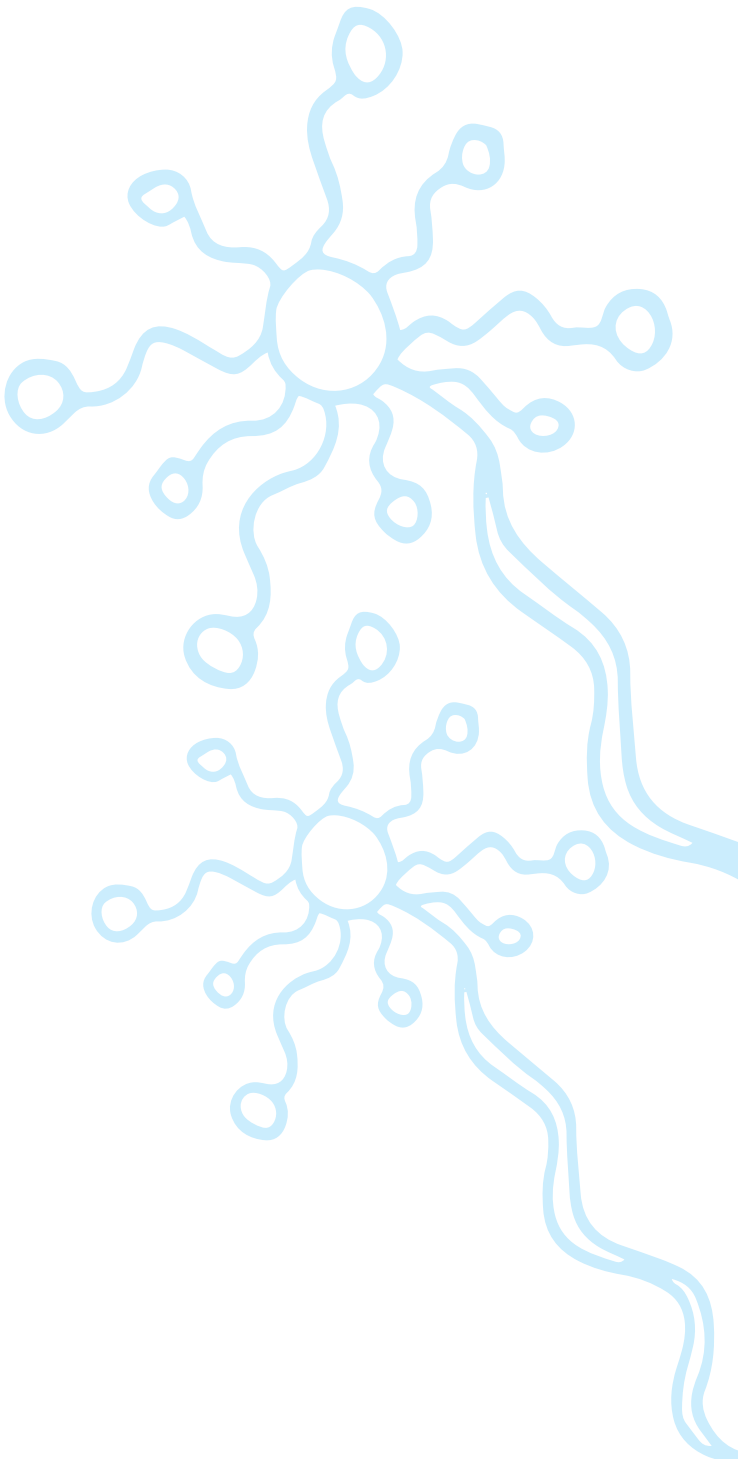
If a registered native title claim overlaps with a project area, there are various obligations to comply with under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Although it is outside the scope of these Guidelines to go into the details of those obligations, the important distinctions to note are:

- engagement with LALCs does not satisfy native title obligations
- general Aboriginal community consultation does not satisfy future act requirements under the Native Title Act
- native title procedural rights apply even if native title has not been determined.

Early engagement and due diligence to understand the Aboriginal communities within the New England REZ and their various rights and interests is essential to avoid project delays, invalid approvals and ensure effective partnerships with Aboriginal people and communities within the New England REZ.

4.3 Other relevant Aboriginal organisations

See Appendix 5.3 for more information on additional Aboriginal organisations within the New England REZ that provide direct employment, training, social support and services to local Aboriginal people and communities in the New England REZ.



5 Appendices

5.1 Key milestones for year 1 (Q2 2026 – Q1 2027)

New England REZ network infrastructure project update can be found on EnergyCo's website: [New England REZ network infrastructure project | EnergyCo](#).

Table 2 outlines the key milestones to be actioned within the first year of the Guidelines being published, note that this is not a detailed implementation plan.

Table 2: Timeline of key milestones for year 1 (Q2 2026 – Q1 2027)

Date	Key milestone	Responsible entity
Q3 2026	Commence engagement with New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups on the Community and Employment Benefit Program	EnergyCo
Q4 2026	Formation of the New England REZ Aboriginal Working Groups	DCCEEW and EnergyCo
Q4 2026	Commence early assessment of future jobs and business opportunities for Aboriginal communities in NE REZ, based on existing studies and plans.	DCCEEW and EnergyCo
Q1 2027	Gathering of potential developers, relevant government agencies and Aboriginal community representatives to set expectations, enable sharing of information and better coordination between all stakeholders creating a space for more meaningful partnerships	EnergyCo
Q2 2027	Discuss with First Nations Clean Energy Network a plan to implement the PowerMakers program for New England REZ Aboriginal communities	DCCEEW

5.2 Relevant organisations and groups within New England

Listed below are community organisations, businesses and government agencies that provide direct employment, training, social support and services to local Aboriginal people and communities in the New England REZ. This is not an exhaustive list, and developers should undertake early and genuine engagement to identify appropriate organisations to involve and partner with.

5.2.1 New England REZ organisations and businesses

- Armidale Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place
- Local Area Land Councils (LALC's):
 - Armidale (LALC)
 - Guyra (LALC)
 - Glen Innes (LALC).
- Aboriginal Local Knowledge Holders group.
- Armidale Council Aboriginal Regional Advisory Committee.
- Gumbaingarr Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.
- Anaiwan Iwatta Aboriginal Corporation.
- Councils:
 - Armidale Regional Council
 - Glen Innes Severn Council.
- Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (TACCO).
- Local Area Land Councils (LALCs):
 - Tamworth (LALC)
 - Nungaroo (LALC)
 - Amaroo (LALC)
 - Tamworth Regional Council.

5.2.2 State-wide organisations

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council.
- NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce.
- Aboriginal Employment Strategy.
- Aboriginal Medical Services.
- University of New England.

5.2.3 Government agencies and entities

- EnergyCo First Nations Outcomes Team.
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.
- NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency.
- Training Services NSW.
- TAFE NSW.

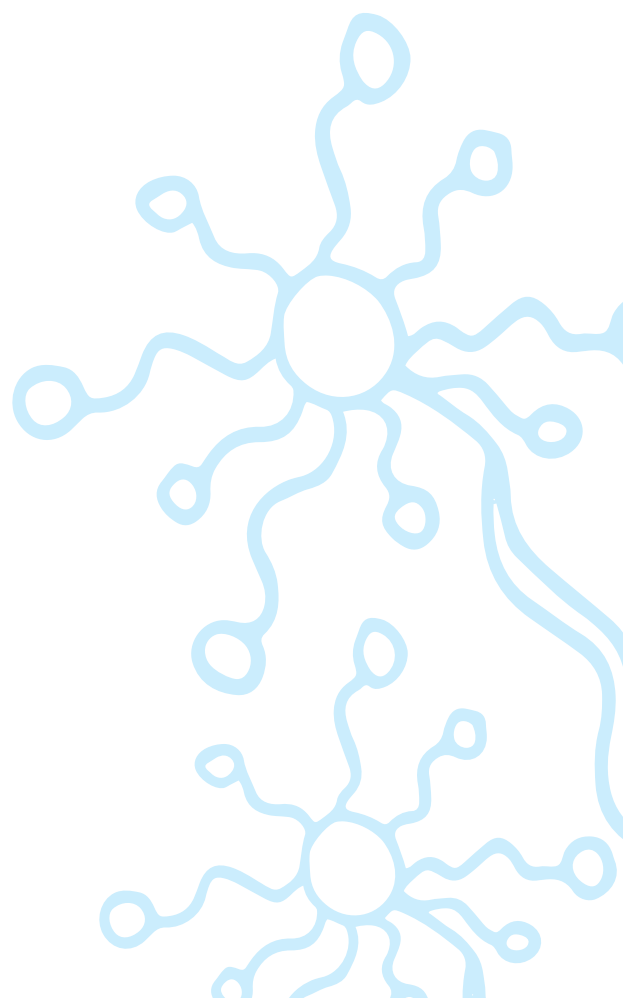
5.3 Glossary

Table 4: Glossary of key terms

Term	Description
Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander	Reference to 'Aboriginal people' includes people of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.
Caring for Country	<p>Caring for Country refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' role as custodians of their ancestral land and their inherent responsibility to safeguard and nurture it.</p> <p>See also <i>Country</i> below.</p>
Consumer Trustee	<p>The Consumer Trustee is the independent Roadmap entity responsible for planning the level, timing and type of investment that will take place under the Roadmap. It designs, plans and implements a schedule of competitive processes to award long-term energy service agreements and access rights.</p> <p>AusEnergy Services Ltd (ASL), a subsidiary of the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), has been appointed as the NSW Consumer Trustee.</p>
Country	This term is often used by Aboriginal people to describe the lands, waterways, skies and seas to which they are connected. It contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.
Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo)	<p>A company established under section 7 of the <i>Energy and Utilities Administration Act 1987</i> (NSW) to coordinate energy infrastructure, e.g. transmission, generation, firming and storage projects, to ensure the right infrastructure is built at the right time, to meet energy needs.</p> <p>Under section 23(5) of the EII Act, EnergyCo is appointed as the Infrastructure Planner for the 5 proposed REZs.</p>
Free, Prior and Informed Consent	<p>FPIC is a principle recognised under international law to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination. It requires that consent be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free: obtained without coercion, intimidation or manipulation. • Prior: consent is sought sufficiently in advance of any approvals or commencement of activities. • Informed: based on full disclosure of relevant information.
Industry and Aboriginal Participation Plan (IAPP)	A written agreement outlining a prospective supplier's activities to employ and offer training to Aboriginal people or use Aboriginal-owned businesses to procure goods and services. The commitments in the participation plan may form part of the contractual agreement if an authorisation or agreement is awarded.

Term	Description
Local Aboriginal community	<p>As per the EII Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an Aboriginal person or a person who has native rights and interests, within the meaning of the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), in relation to the land to which the relevant project relates the LALC for the area to which the relevant project relates other Aboriginal persons prescribed by the regulations. <p>Note that the EII Regulation does not currently prescribe any additional Aboriginal persons or groups as falling within this definition.</p>
Local Aboriginal Land Council(s) (LALCs)	<p>These are NSW land councils that have been established under the <i>Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983</i> (NSW). These councils are representative bodies that play a crucial role in advocating for and managing land rights and interests on behalf of Aboriginal communities.</p>
Prescribed body corporate (PBC)/ registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBC)	<p>When a Native Title determination is made under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth), a prescribed body corporate (PBC) is established to protect the Native Title rights and manage obligations and responsibilities provided under the Act. It is a requirement for Native Title holders to incorporate under the <i>Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006</i> (Cth). This allows the PBC to become a separate legal entity from its members and benefit from legal rights and obligations, such as entering a contract and employing people.</p> <p>The <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth) states that all PBCs must register with the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT). Once this registration is official, the PBC becomes a registered native title body corporate (RNTBC). An RNTBC indicates it is a corporation that manages Native Title.</p>
Renewable Energy Zones (REZs)	<p>Areas in NSW that combine renewable energy generation such as wind and solar, storage such as batteries, and high-voltage electricity network infrastructure to deliver electricity to users. The EII Act contemplates at least 5 such zones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central-West Orana Hunter-Central Coast Illawarra New England South West. <p>REZs are declared under the EII Act.</p>
Roadmap developers/ project developers/ proponents	<p>A person or organisation that is carrying out a REZ network infrastructure project, a Priority Transmission Infrastructure Project, or a generation or storage infrastructure project seeking a long-term energy service agreement or access rights under a REZ access scheme.</p>
Storage	<p>Storage refers to the collection and retention of energy generated from renewable sources, such as solar or wind power, for later use. Common storage technologies include batteries, pumped hydro storage, and thermal energy storage, enabling the efficient integration of renewable energy into the overall energy grid.</p>

Term	Description
Scheme Financial Vehicle (SFV)	SFV is established under the EII Act to intermediate cash flows between entities undertaking legislated activities under the Roadmap. As a credit worth counterparty, SFV maintains the Electricity Infrastructure Fund. SFV acts as the contract counterparty to Long Term Energy Service Agreements with LTES Operators and to Project Development Agreements which include social licence commitments. SFV receives payments from project developers under Access Payment Deeds and makes regulated payments to network operators for carrying out infrastructure projects.
Transmission	Transmission in the context of renewable energy refers to the system of interconnected components, such as power lines, substations and transformers, that transport electricity from the generation source (such as a wind farm or solar facility) to distribution networks and ultimately to consumers. It plays a crucial role in delivering electricity efficiently over long distances, connecting renewable energy resources to areas with high energy demand.



5.4 Relevant section of the EII Act and other legislation

5.4.1 Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 key sections

3 Objects of Act

1. The objects of this Act are —
 - a. to improve the affordability, reliability, security and sustainability of electricity supply, and
 - b. to co-ordinate investment in new generation, storage, network and related infrastructure, and
 - c. to encourage investment in new generation, storage, network and related infrastructure by reducing risk for investors, and
 - d. to foster local community support for investment in new generation, storage, network and related infrastructure, and
 - e. to support economic development and manufacturing, and
 - f. to create employment, including employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and
 - g. to invest in education and training, and
 - h. to promote local industry, manufacturing and jobs, and
 - i. to promote export opportunities for generation, storage and network technology.
2. The following objects also apply to Parts 4–6 —
 - a. to increase employment and income opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales, and
 - b. to promote consultation and negotiation with the traditional Aboriginal owners of land on which generation, storage and network infrastructure is proposed to be constructed or operated under this Act.
3. A person or body exercising a function under this Act must do so in a way that is consistent with the objects of this Act.

4 Consultation and negotiation with local Aboriginal communities

1. The Minister is to issue guidelines about consultation and negotiation with the local Aboriginal community in relation to relevant projects for the purposes of increasing employment and income opportunities for the local Aboriginal community.
2. The Minister is to take the guidelines into account when exercising the Minister's functions under Part 5, Division 2.
3. To give effect to the guidelines, the Minister may impose a condition on a direction under section 32 or an authorisation under section 36(2).
4. The consumer trustee is to take the guidelines into account when exercising the consumer trustee's functions under Part 6, Divisions 3 and 4.
5. The infrastructure planner must take the guidelines into account when exercising the following functions —
 - a. a function under Part 5,
 - b. a function prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this section as a function in relation to which the infrastructure planner must, when exercising, take the guidelines into account.
- 5A. To give effect to the guidelines, the infrastructure planner must —
 - a. make the appointment of a network operator under section 31A(1) subject to conditions the infrastructure planner considers necessary to give effect to the guidelines, and
 - b. include, in a recommendation to the Minister under section 31B(1), details of conditions to which the infrastructure planner considers the direction should be made subject to give effect to the guidelines.
6. The guidelines are to be published on the Department's website.

7. In this section —

local Aboriginal community includes —

- a. an Aboriginal person who has native title rights and interests, within the meaning of the *Native Title Act 1993* of the Commonwealth, in relation to the land to which the relevant project relates, and
- b. the Local Aboriginal Land Council for the area to which the relevant project relates, and
- c. other Aboriginal persons prescribed by the regulations.

relevant project means —

- a. a REZ network infrastructure project or priority network infrastructure project, and
- b. an infrastructure project to which an LTES agreement applies.

5.4.2 Other relevant legislation

The following legislations are mechanisms for recognition of land rights and native title processes in NSW. There may be circumstances where both land rights and native title coexist. Developers need to research the existing interests, and the nature of those interests, on the areas that are proposed for development.

Note that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list, only the key relevant legislations:

- ***Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*** – objective of this legislation is to provide land rights and to vest land in NSW to Aboriginal Land Councils through a process of lodging claims for certain Crown Lands.
- ***Native title Act 1993 (Cth)*** – objective of this legislation is to provide a process for legal recognition and protection of native title.

The following legislation protect Aboriginal cultural heritage in NSW:

- ***National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)*** – the Act protects both Aboriginal places and objects. An Aboriginal place is a place of special significance in Aboriginal cultural that is declared by the Minister for the Environment. Aboriginal objects are deposits, objects or material evidence relating to Aboriginal habitation of New South Wales.
- ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (Cth)*** – where there is a threat to cultural heritage and state laws do not offer adequate protection, the Federal Minister for the Environment can make a declaration if the area or object is of significance under Aboriginal traditions.

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2150

4 Parramatta Square
12 Darcy Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

Office hours:
Monday to Friday
9.00 am — 5.00 pm

T: 1300 081 047
E: water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au
W: water.dpie.nsw.gov.au