

Central-West Orana REZ Community Reference Group

Meeting minutes

Details

Meeting: CWO Community Reference Group meeting #1
Location: The Exchange, 98 Macquarie Street, Dubbo NSW 2830
Date/time: Thursday 1 September, 10.07am to 12.17pm

Attendees

Category	Attendees
Independent Chairperson	Lisa Andrews (LA)
EnergyCo representatives	James Hay, Chief Executive Officer (JH) Mike Young, Executive Director Planning & Communities (MY) Brian Cullinane, CWO Planning & Environment Lead (BC) Cleo Andrews, CWO Community & Stakeholder Manager (CA) Bridget Kelleher, CWO Place Manager (BK) Lisa Clark, CWO Place Manager (LC) Josh Kwan, CWO Technical Advisor (online) (JK)
Council delegates	Cr Kathy Rindfleish, Warrumbungle Shire Council (online) (KR)
Community representatives	Dougald Morse (DM) Colin Kilby (CK) Sally Edwards (SE) John Kelly (JK)
Stakeholder groups	Grant Gjessing, Business Mudgee (GJ) Andrew Bray, RE-Alliance (AB) <i>[arrived at 10.10am]</i> David Thorne, NSW Farmers (Mudgee) (DT) Beverley Smiles, Central West Environment Council (BS) Rosemary Hadaway, Mudgee District Environment Group & Watershed Landcare (RH)
Apologies	None.

Meeting minutes

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
1	Welcome and housekeeping	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting opened at 10.07am Acknowledgement of Country AB arrived at 10.10am
2	Introductions	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All attendees provided introductions to the group.
3	CRG administration and governance matters	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA outlined purpose of the CRG and its objectives as per the Terms of Reference. LA requested outstanding declaration forms to be submitted. LA will distribute the draft meeting minutes to members for review within one week of the meeting. The names and email addresses of CRG members will appear on EnergyCo's website. Phone numbers will not be published online. No objections raised by CRG members. Correspondence will be included with the meeting notice and recorded in the minutes.
4	EnergyCo presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About the CWO REZ Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) Who is EnergyCo? Other stakeholders in the REZ The REZ transmission project Working with the community Strategies and initiatives Next steps 	JH / MY / BC / CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JH provided background on the energy transition and the broader context of NSW Government energy policy. MY provided an introduction to the Central-West Orana REZ and why the region was identified as the first REZ under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap. MY advised that EnergyCo is working closely with the developers of renewable energy generation projects as we plan the REZ transmission network and coordinate impacts within the REZ. Generators will be invited to participate in future CRG meetings to discuss broader REZ issues such as cumulative impacts and community benefit initiatives. Action: Generators to be invited to future CRG meetings. MY recognised the scale of change to the Central-West Orana region as a result of the REZ and acknowledged community concern about these changes. EnergyCo is committed to balancing the impacts of the REZ and ensuring it delivers positive outcomes for communities. MY provided an overview of the role of EnergyCo as Infrastructure Planner for the REZs in NSW. EnergyCo's responsibilities include: leading community and stakeholder engagement

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			<p>for the REZ transmission project and broader REZ issues, engaging with generators, carrying out the easement and property acquisition process, leading the environmental planning approval process for the REZ transmission project, and coordinating community benefit initiatives. EnergyCo is also leading the tender process to engage a Network Operator to build, operate and maintain the REZ transmission network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MY described the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders in the REZ, including proponents of generation and storage projects, local councils, Transgrid, the Minister for Energy, the Consumer Trustee, Australian Energy Regulator (AER), communities and key stakeholder groups. • MY explained a key role of the CRG will be to help provide a coordinated approach with generators to managing issues in the REZ. • BC provided an overview of the REZ transmission project and current status. The scoping report is currently being finalised for release in September 2022 and will be supported by a program of community engagement activities in the region. • MY provided a description of the refined transmission corridor which is due to be announced in September 2022. The corridor has been refined to about 1km wide and there have been some changes to the route announced in February 2022 following further community engagement, design development and field investigation work. • CA provided a summary of community engagement activities carried out to date and next steps. A project update will be released shortly which will include the refined transmission corridor and details of community information sessions (CA to include with minutes distribution). Action: CA to add CRG members to distribution list to ensure they receive updates about future engagement activities. • CA outlined the various strategies and initiatives being carried out by EnergyCo to help provide community benefits and manage impacts in the REZ. • CA concluded the presentation by explaining the next steps and key milestones for EnergyCo in late 2022 and 2023.

5	Questions and answers	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BS noted that there is no map which shows all the generation projects in the REZ. MY recognised this is an important tool and EnergyCo is currently planning an interactive map which would show publicly available projects in line with information available on the NSW Planning Portal. EnergyCo is planning to have the map available for community information sessions in September and it will be made available on its website soon. AB informed the CRG that RE-Alliance has a map that shows projects. • CK asked at what stage generation projects become public knowledge (i.e. SEARS). MY advised that they are usually publicised earlier than the SEARs, such as at the scoping report stage. Prior to this there are usually sensitivities around landowner discussions which mean the project area isn't public knowledge. • DT noted easement acquisition is a contentious topic with landowners and more compensation needs to be provided. MY advised EnergyCo is currently looking at a policy around this and will provide further updates once finalised. • CK asked if the transmission route is being determined by what the generators want. MY provided context on the process for generators being awarded access rights to the network which is happening concurrently. EnergyCo is working with major generators as it plans the REZ transmission network however this is subject to the generators receiving planning approval and access rights. • CK asked whether landowners are aware that they are in the transmission corridor. CA advised EnergyCo has carried out an extensive program of engagement to understand landowner sentiment within the study corridor and this has been used to inform the current route. MY noted that this builds on previous consultation undertaken by Transgrid to gauge landowner sentiment. • CK asked if the Consumer Trustee is a private or public entity. JH explained AEMO Services is a subsidiary of AEMO which has a number of shareholders, including industry stakeholders. AEMO Services is not a NSW Government authority, however, the NSW Government does have an interest in AEMO. JH provided further background on the auction process for access rights and long-term energy service agreements (LTESAs). Action: EnergyCo to circulate criteria on how generator access rights will be assessed by the Consumer Trustee. • CK asked if the EnergyCo model is new or already established worldwide. JH explained that there are similar schemes being used in Europe.
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- JK disagreed with the use of the term ‘farms’ to describe solar projects. Stating that farms produce food and fibre. MY acknowledged this feedback and noted ‘renewable generation projects’ is the appropriate terminology. MY also noted the NSW Agricultural Commissioner is undertaking a review into the coexistence of agriculture and renewables. A report will be published outlining the responses to issues raised during consultation. JK stated that he has made 3 submissions to the commissioner and is yet to receive a response.
- BS suggested a review be carried out into the cumulative impacts to biodiversity and that a contiguous area of good quality bushland be acquired to meet biodiversity offset requirements across REZ projects. MY advised this is something that EnergyCo is currently investigating.
- BS also raised the issue of the critical shortage of workers as well as accommodation in the region. BC advised that Umwelt is preparing a Social Impact Assessment and these matters will form part of this report.
- RH commented that limited research has been carried out in Australia into the co-location of solar and agriculture. RH suggested that the generators should be encouraged to be part of research to help develop protocols and priorities.
- JK asked about nuclear energy generation. JH provided context into the technological and regulatory constraints around nuclear energy and why it is not included in current NSW energy policy.
- BS queried what is planned for Wollar noting current upgrade of Wollar Transgrid substation and construction of Wollar Solar Farm. MY explained that a new switching station is planned to be built next to Transgrid’s existing Wollar substation to facilitate the transfer of energy from the REZ network to the broader NSW transmission network.
- SE asked if the community would have their say on cumulative impact strategies. CA advised that the community would be invited to provide their feedback in Q1 2023. Due to the interest from the CRG in the cumulative impact strategies, CA suggested this could be further discussed at the next meeting. **Action:** Cumulative impact strategies to be put on the agenda for the 2nd CRG meeting in November.

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BS asked about the status of EIS environmental assessments. BY advised that assessments had commenced to inform the EIS, including biodiversity, heritage, flora and fauna, etc. JK raised the issue of farmers being contacted by generators, offering above market prices for arable farming land. DT commented that this was a commercial matter. RH commented that renewable energy projects had resulted in dispute amongst community members and that generation projects needed to do further work to build positive relationships with host communities.
6	General business	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None raised.
7	Next meeting	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next meeting proposed for Monday 14 November at 1pm. (To be confirmed) CRG nominated Mudgee as the next location. Mudgee Parklands Resort was identified as a possible meeting venue. LA noted that if any topics arise before then, an extraordinary meeting may be held.
8	Meeting close		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting closed at 12.17pm.

Action items

No.	Action	Responsibility	Due date	Comments/ updates	Status
1	Generators to be invited to future CRG meetings.	CA	Next meeting		Open
2	Add CRG members to distribution list to ensure they receive updates about future engagement activities.	CA	12/09/22	In progress.	Open
3	EnergyCo to circulate criteria on how generator access rights will be assessed by the Consumer Trustee.	CA / LA	12/09/22	Provided with meeting minutes.	Closed
4	Cumulative impact strategies to be put on the agenda for the 2nd CRG meeting in November.	CA / LA	Next meeting		Open

Next meeting

Meeting details	
Date:	Tuesday 29 November 2022
Time:	10am to 12n
Location:	Mudgee (venue to be confirmed)

Suggestions for Future Guest Speakers	
Department of Planning & Environment	Present on Assessment Process
Generators	Proposed projects in the REZ
Umwelt	Consultant undertaking Social Impact Assessment
RE-Alliance	Co-existence between generators and farmers