

Meeting minutes

Central-West Orana REZ Community Reference Group

Monday, 30 January 2023

11.02am to 1.09pm

Western Plains Cultural Centre, 76 Wingewarra Street, Dubbo

Attendance

Category	Attendees
Independent Chair	Lisa Andrews (LA)
EnergyCo representatives	Cara Inia, Director Community & Place (CI) Adam Clarke, Manager Planning & Policy (AC) Cleo Andrews, CWO Community & Stakeholder Lead (CA) (online) Brian Cullinane, CWO Planning & Environment Lead (BC) (online) Joel Gruber, CWO Technical Advisor (JG) (online) Simon Fisher, Project Manager Central-West Orana REZ (SF) (online) Bridget Kelleher, Senior CWO Place Manager (BK) Grace Patterson, CWO Place Manager (GP)
LGA Delegates	Mayor Matthew Dickerson, Dubbo Regional Council (MD) Cr Katie Dicker, Mid-Western Regional Council (KD) (online)
Community representatives	Dougald Morse (DM) Colin Kilby (CK) Sally Edwards (SE) John Kelly (JK)
Stakeholder groups	Grant Gjessing – Business Mudgee (GG) Kate Hook, RE-Alliance (KH) David Thorne, NSW Farmers (Mudgee) (DT) Beverley Smiles, Central West Environment Council (BS) Rosemary Hadaway, Mudgee District Environment Group & Watershed Landcare (RH)
Invited guests	Gordon Ou, Director, Marble Energy (Cobbora Solar Farm) (GO) Sarah Hafez, Community Engagement and Communications Manager, ACEN Renewables (Valley of the Winds, Stubbo Solar and Birriwa Solar), (SH) Jim Belford, Head of Social Performance, Origin Energy (Dapper Solar Farm) (JB)
Apologies	Cr Kathy Rindfleish, Warrumbungle Shire Council (KR) Mike Young, Executive Director, EnergyCo (MY)

Category	Attendees
	Diana Mitchell, Head of Planning, Lightsource BP (Sandy Creek Solar Farm)

Agenda items

Item	Details	Responsibility
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA
2	Welcome and introductions	LA
3	Apologies	LA
4	Business arising from inaugural CRG	LA
5	Declarations	LA
6	Correspondence report	LA
7	EnergyCo project update and presentation	EnergyCo
8	Questions and discussion	All
9	General business	LA
10	Next meeting	LA

EnergyCo Meeting minutes

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA	
2	Welcome and housekeeping	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting opened at 11:02am. All members were welcomed and those attending via video-conferencing were introduced.
3	Apologies	LA	Cr Kathy Rindfleish, Warrumbungle Shire Council, Mike Young, Executive Director, EnergyCo
4	Business arising from last meeting	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide update on the Listening Survey at the next meeting – closed Update advertising artwork for local papers to make it larger and more noticeable to readers – closed CRG members to send through any issues they would like EnergyCo to raise with developers of generation projects. These can be sent to LA who will forward to EnergyCo for action – ongoing Provide information about Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme (SBP Scheme) for circulation with the meeting minutes – closed JK's information to be shared with the previous meeting minutes – closed
5	Declarations	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA declared that she is an approved Independent Chairperson, engaged by Energy. All members with outstanding Governance Forms were asked to submit the completed declarations.
6	Correspondence report	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As included in the Agenda. SE provided a number of questions – these were answered by EnergyCo prior to the meeting and/or discussed during the meeting DT provided correspondence about Telstra's involvement in the CRG. LA noted an update on telecommunications will be provided in EnergyCo's presentation
7	EnergyCo presentation		
7.1	Project update	CI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CI provided an overview of activities carried out since the last CRG meeting, including ongoing EIS development, continued landholder engagement and land acquisition process to commence in Q2 2023 CWO access rights tender will be carried out by the Consumer Trustee in Q2 2023.

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7.2	Community listening program	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC provided an overview of state-wide research carried out in late 2022 as part of EnergyCo's community listening program which aims to understand current community sentiment on the REZs in NSW
7.3	Upcoming consultation	CI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CI provided an overview of EnergyCo's upcoming consultation between January and March 2023 to seek feedback on community benefit initiatives
7.4	Funding	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC described the mechanisms through which funding opportunities are available in CWO REZ
7.5	Housing and workforce accommodation	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC provided context on workforce accommodation requirements for the REZ and possible solutions for community feedback, including legacy housing initiatives
7.6	Training and skills	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC provided an update on the need for training and skills development in the REZ and the need for training initiatives to support construction workforce requirements
7.7	Telecommunication	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC outlined the need for telecommunication improvements in REZ communities and opportunities to improve mobile blackspots as part of the transmission project
7.8	Community energy	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC explained potential community energy initiatives under investigation to provide access to affordable energy for REZ host communities, such as solar and battery programs, power purchasing agreements and electric vehicle charging
7.9	Social infrastructure and services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC explained opportunities to boost social infrastructure and services which will be likely to experience increased demand due to REZ projects
7.	Road upgrades	JB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JG explained the types of road upgrades proposed in the REZ, including widening for oversize and overmass vehicle movements (OSOM) as well as access roads and local road upgrades JG outlined EnergyCo's role in coordinating road upgrades in the REZ and facilitating input from various stakeholders An initial analysis of OSOM vehicle movements has been carried out for consultation with Transport for NSW for enabling work ahead of construction of the transmission project (i.e. layovers, rest stops, road widening) Future Network Operator would be expected to carry out upgrades to sections of Merotherie Road and Spring Ridge Road to facilitate construction traffic.
8	Questions and discussion		
8.1	General discussion	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BS: Has the alignment been determined? BC explained the study corridor outlined in the scoping report is to be narrowed for the Environmental Impact Statement to about 200 metres. Landowner consultation is continuing. JG advised 500kV lines will have an easement width of 70 metres while

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<p>330kV lines will have 60 metre wide easements. Dual 500kV line generally has an easement width of 140 metres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CK: Who owns the easement? JG: Property owners continue to own their land, however EnergyCo acquires property rights in the form of an easement for the purposes of building and operating the transmission lines. Action: EnergyCo to circulate easement acquisition fact sheet with the meeting minutes which contains further details. • CK asked if the Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme is different to buying land. AC explained that the energy hub sites will be purchased outright by EnergyCo, but the easements are only rights of access and reassured that the scheme is not a payment for the purchase of the land. • BS asked what the term access rights refers to. AC clarified it refers to access right for the generators to connect to the REZ network infrastructure. • CK: Who is the Consumer Trustee? AC: The CT is AEMO Services, a subsidiary of AEMO (the Australian Energy Market Operator). Action: For next meeting, include slide on different stakeholders/entities involved in the REZ and their responsibilities. RH noted it would be helpful to include this information on EnergyCo's website. • Action: LA requested list of acronyms to be included with the minutes moving forward. RH asked for links to be included to relevant websites. • SE: About 55 people from CWO completed EnergyCo's stakeholder listening survey and asked if EnergyCo finds this acceptable. CI acknowledged the low numbers from CWO and that this would not be highly representative of views in the REZ. • SE asked for details to be included with the minutes on how people can complete EnergyCo's CWO community benefits survey. Action: Details to be included with the minutes. • DT: It would be helpful for information to be included in Council newsletters. Note: EnergyCo shares all updates with affected councils and it is at their discretion if they choose to publish information via their networks. EnergyCo uses a variety of communication methods to publicise its activities, including print advertising in local and regional papers, media releases, letterbox drops to residences in the project area and via its e-newsletters. • MD asked if EnergyCo would be calling people to complete the survey (i.e. cold calling via market research). CA explained that typically EnergyCo would invite written submissions during consultation periods however this time the survey is being used as a tool to gather tangible data on community views. • JK: Communication from solar projects to neighbouring residents has been poor.

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RH: Will a report be released ahead of the engagement sessions. AC confirmed EnergyCo is working on a report but the timing for release is to be confirmed. SE advised EnergyCo should keep the survey open until after the report is released. CI acknowledged this feedback. • RH: Where does project decommissioning fit in with funding? AC: Generation projects are required to consider this as part of their planning and development consents. Funding for community benefits which is currently being discussed is in addition to what's required of projects through the normal planning projects. EnergyCo is not the planning authority and therefore doesn't set the decommissioning requirements for generators. • DT asked if there are bonds associated with the decommissioning of such projects. JB explained it is dependent on the project's approval conditions. Developers normally have to provide a 'bond' to rehabilitate the land. • SE: What is the policy around developer community benefit funds? AC: This is a separate process via developers and councils. But EnergyCo is looking to coordinate efforts across a number of stakeholders. • JK: What is the projected life of solar panels and who is responsible for ensuring they return to farmland after decommissioning. LA: This is a condition of consent on individual projects under the planning system. • SE commented that the community wants to know the extent of cumulative impacts before deciding how funds should be spent. • Discussions on the availability of the draft cumulative impacts report and the importance of having this information available prior to the finalisation of the Community Survey to enable people to have all the information before them. EnergyCo agreed and took comments on notice. • DT: How tall are the transmission towers? JG: 330kV towers are 60-65 metres tall while 500 kV towers are 70 metres tall. • SE: How will traffic impacts be mitigated through Merriwa town centre? JG: EnergyCo is discussing with Transport for NSW about what upgrades may be required for the Golden Highway to facilitate oversize/overmass vehicle movements. Looking at options such as alternative routes however this requires further engagement with Transport for NSW, councils and generators to coordinate the approach. We know Denman is one of the constrained areas that is being looked at closely. • BS: Where is funding going to come from for roads? AC: EnergyCo is currently looking at the funding mechanisms for these initiatives, including funding available through other state and federal government programs and agencies. While EnergyCo is the infrastructure planner, there are a number of stakeholders that have responsibilities in facilitating the REZ. JG noted there are different funding sources for different tiers of work.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DT: Merotherie Road needs a rebuild rather than an upgrade. JG: Flooding from the Tabralgar River is an issue so we are investigating what can be done to improve flood immunity in addition to the widening component of the work. DT raised concerns that Merotherie Road isn't planned to be upgraded all the way into Gulgong, with JG explaining that only the section of the road to be used by the projects is proposed to be upgraded. CI noted that EnergyCo is seeking community feedback on the types of road improvements that will be carried out from a community benefit perspective, so it encourages people to submit their comments via the consultation process. CK asked what the farthest point is west, that road upgrades would be carried out. JG replied that the most western point will be Saxa Road. CK asked if it was possible to bring the materials by rail and JG replied that this had been investigated however preference is to truck in from the Port of Newcastle due to rail constraints for oversize/overmass equipment. Action: January project update to be sent with the minutes.
8	General business	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following on from SE questions submitted, SE questioned if the CRG is meeting the terms and objectives of the CRG. LA read out the terms and objectives of the CRG. SE: The meeting prior to the scoping report release was constructive and perhaps meetings should be scheduled around project milestones and/or important information. LA noted that quarterly meetings are planned in line with the terms of reference and that some quarterly CRG meetings may provide more information than others. LA reiterated that just because meetings are set, members don't have to wait to bring up queries. There is also the option of extraordinary meetings. LA reiterated questions may be sent in anytime for EnergyCo to answer for distribution to the group. DM asked to explain the role of the Network Operator. AC explained EnergyCo is the Infrastructure Planner. The network operator will be responsible for the design, build, finance, operation and maintenance of the REZ transmission network. A Network Operator will be appointed mid this year. DT asked about the process for access rights to the transmission network. AC: The Consumer Trustee will run an auction process for access rights. The process is open to all generators within the Central-West Orana REZ, not just the CFGs. BS asked if Stubbo Solar Farm will connect into the Central-West Orana REZ transmission network. AC: No, they have arranged their own connection (to the NSW transmission network). RH asked when the Consumer Trustee evaluates the applications, do they do any of their own investigations into the applications; who will be validating the application, and how is the social licence validated. AC stated there are conditions associated with the agreements. Action: Invitation to be extended to the Consumer Trustee for a future meeting. BS: Concerned about easements going through vulnerable ecosystem such as the Narragamba Swamp and the Wilpinjong Mine Regent Honeyeater biodiversity offset areas. Requested an

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<p>explanation of how the impact on conditioned offset areas will be dealt with. There are inconsistencies with the approval planning process for solar projects not required under conditions to do any community consultation work. Wollar Solar Farm has no CCC making it difficult for the community to be informed LA: Not aware of any solar projects that have a CCC, only wind developments. LA to write to DPE raising concerns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JK stated that solar projects should not be erected on prime agricultural land. MD suggested he take this issue to his local member. • SE requested an overview of milestones for the year. Action: To be provided with minutes.
9	Meeting close		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting closed at 1:09 pm. LA thanked all for their attendance and contribution.

Action items

No	Action	Responsibility	Due date	Comments/updates	Status
1	EnergyCo to circulate easement acquisition fact sheet with the meeting minutes.	CA	7/2/23	Attached with minutes.	Complete
2	For next meeting, include slide on different stakeholders involved in the REZ and their responsibilities.	CA	3/4/23		To be actioned
3	List of acronyms to be included with the minutes moving forward. RH asked for links to be included to relevant websites.	CA	7/2/23	Attached with minutes.	Complete
4	Details to be provided with the minutes on how people can complete EnergyCo's online survey.	CA	7/2/23	The survey is available to complete via this link: https://dpieresearch.syd1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5bXirxTjMYjsOl8?jfe=new	Complete
5	January project update to be sent with the minutes.	CA	7/2/23	Attached with minutes.	Complete
6	LA to include SE's questions with the minutes.	LA	7/2/23		Complete
7	Invitation to be extended to the Consumer Trustee for a future meeting.	CA	3/4/23		To be actioned
8	Write to DPE raising concern that Solar Farms (SSD developments) don't require CCC to be established	LA	3/4/23		To be actioned
9	Project milestones to be provided with the minutes.	CA	7/2/23	Upcoming milestones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q2 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preferred Network Operator identified ○ Community feedback report released for community benefit consultation • Q3 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public exhibition of the Environmental Impact Statement 	Complete

Next meeting

Date: Week beginning Monday 3 April 2023

Time: 11am to 1pm

Venue: Mudgee

Future Meetings

Date: Week beginning Monday 24 July 2023, Dubbo NSW

Date: Week beginning Monday 23 October 2023, Mudgee NSW

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition	Relevant links
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator	aemo.com.au
AEMO Services	Consumer Trustee and subsidiary of AEMO	aemoservices.com.au
AER	Australian Energy Regulator	aer.gov.au
CCC	Community Consultative Committee	planning.nsw.gov.au/Assess-and-Regulate/Development-Assessment/Community-Consultative-Committees
CFG	Candidate Foundation Generator	energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/renewable-energy-generation-projects
NO	Network Operator	
OSOM	Oversize and over-mass vehicle movements	
PAN	Proposed Acquisition Notice	
REZ	Renewable Energy Zone	
RNI	REZ Network Infrastructure (the transmission project)	
SBP Scheme	Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme	energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/strategic-benefit-payments-scheme