

Meeting minutes

Extraordinary meeting Central-West Orana REZ Community Reference Group and NSW Telco Authority

Thursday 22 June 2023

11:02am to 12:10pm

Online via Microsoft Teams / EnergyCo Office, 155 Macquarie Street, Dubbo NSW 2830

Attendance

Category	Attendees
Independent Chair	Lisa Andrews (LA) (online)
EnergyCo representatives	Thomas Watt, Director Planning & Policy (TW) (online) Julia Jelbart, Project & Policy Officer (JJ) (online) Cleo Andrews, CWO Community & Stakeholder Lead (CA) (online) Kate Hunter, Community & Stakeholder Project Manager (KH) (online) Bridget Kelleher, Senior CWO Place Manager (BK) Anna Howard, CWO Place Manager (AH) 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)
Stakeholder groups	Kate Hook, RE-Alliance (KH) Beverley Smiles, Central West Environment Council (BS) (online) Rosemary Hadaway, Mudgee District Environment Group & Watershed Landcare (RH) (online) Grant Gjessing, Business Mudgee (GG) (online) Michael Peachey, Wellington Information Neighbourhood Services (MP)
Electorate office representatives	Mel Manchee, Senior Electorate Officer, Barwon Electorate Office (MM) Jane Diffey, Senior Electorate Officer, Dubbo Electorate Office (JD)
Invited guests	NSW Telco Authority (NSWTA): Alanna Linn, Director Whole of Government Connectivity Leadership (AL) Derek Francis, Associate Director (DF) Joanna Yang, Connectivity Lead (JY) India Forbes, Assistant Strategy Analyst (IF)

Category	Attendees
	Matt Yan, Assistant Strategy Analyst (MY)
Apologies	Cr Kathy Rindfleish, Warrumbungle Shire Council David Thorne, NSW Farmers (Mudgee) Colin Kilby, community representative Sally Edwards, community representative John Kelly, community representative

Agenda items

Item	Details	Responsibility
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA
2	Welcome and introductions	LA
3	Apologies	LA
4	Purpose of meeting	LA
5	Business arising & correspondence	LA
6	Declarations	LA
7	NSW Telco Authority presentation	AL
8	General business	LA
9	Next meeting	LA

EnergyCo Meeting minutes

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA	
2	Welcome and introductions	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting opened at 11:02am Welcomed attendees including new CRG member Michael Peachey, electorate office representatives and invited attendees from NSWTA.
3	Apologies	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cr Kathy Rindfleish, Warrumbungle Shire Council David Thorne, NSW Farmers (Mudgee) Community representatives – Colin Kirby, Sally Edwards and John Kelly Mike Young, Executive Director Planning and Communities Cara Inia, Director Community and Place
4	Purpose of meeting	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA introduced NSWTA and outlined their aim to seek input from CRG members on what technology would provide the best outcomes for mobile and internet connectivity in the REZ. LA explained the purpose of the meeting is to help inform NSWTA's ongoing investigations into telecommunications improvements as part of the delivery of the REZ. LA acknowledged that telecommunications in the REZ has been raised as an issue a number of times in previous CRG meetings. LA clarified that NSWTA is leading this extraordinary meeting and EnergyCo is acting as facilitator.
5	Business arising and correspondence	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business arising and correspondence will be held over to the July CRG meeting.
6	Declarations	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
7	Telco Authority presentation		
7.1	Introduction	AL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AL introduced NSWTA and their role as a statutory authority responsible for ensuring the availability of modern, high speed telecommunications services across NSW. AL explained NSWTA has been engaged by EnergyCo to help investigate options for improving mobile and internet connectivity in the REZ. AL introduced NSWTA's work to develop the NSW Connectivity Strategy which aims to ensure affordable and resilient connectivity in NSW. AL explained that NSWTA is engaging with the CRG to gain an understanding of the needs of communities in the REZ. <p>BS: What is NSWTA's relationship with providers such, as Telstra? Telstra is carrying out upgrades in the area, but we [the community] are not sure what the purpose of the upgrades are. DF explained that NSWTA has a relationship with all telecommunications providers and is working with them on potential options to improve telecommunications in the REZ.</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DF explained NSWTA is still in the early investigation stage for telecommunication improvements in the REZ and the intention of today's meeting is to gain feedback from the CRG to better understand potential options moving forward. DF added that NSWTA is planning further engagement with the community and industry groups following this initial consultation with the CRG.
7.2	Discussion 1 – Please share us the connectivity problems you are experiencing or have experienced in the Central-West Orana region.	IF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IF introduced the first discussion topic and asked CRG members to provide feedback. BK: CRG members are aware of the telecommunications issues in the region. Can NSWTA provide more information on the solutions it is investigating to help inform this discussion? AL responded that there are a number of different technologies NSWTA is investigating to help improve different connectivity issues in the region and the purpose of this discussion is to better understand the challenges currently faced by communities in the region. DF explained that NSWTA aims to identify the technologies used by people in the region to better understand what is needed to improve the network i.e. improving fixed wireless. As an example of this, DF explained new telecommunication towers can have stations installed to help improve telecommunications connectivity, however, this may only improve connectivity where roads are close to towers. AL stated that NSWTA is still investigating all options. AL added that public safety is a key driver of connectivity solutions to allow people to reach emergency services when they need to. MP advised that Nanima Aboriginal Village (NAV) has no mobile service and little internet service which is an issue when it is located only 7km from the nearest town. MP shared that a family emergency that could have been prevented if there was mobile coverage in the area. MP: Is NSW Telco involved in building towers? If not, who builds the towers? Is NSW TA able to develop towers for villages like Nanima and surrounding towns and villages? AL thanked MP for sharing his story and informed the group that NSW TA does build towers, however it does not provide the connectivity services itself. AL added that the NSW government's 'close the gap' program aims to provide opportunities to improve telecommunications in areas with a high Aboriginal population. DF explained that NSWTA aims to maximise the capabilities for telecommunication carriers such as Telstra and Optus to use towers to improve mobile coverage. DF stated that NSWTA can work to reduce the cost of towers in the REZ so they become a more attractive investment for suppliers. DF added that NSWTA can seek funding to cover the gap for the investment to occur, our job is to help them do it. MD: How can NSWTA guarantee connectivity improvements and benefits in the REZ if the tenders are with telecommunication carriers? Telephone and internet should be available to everyone in the region as it is in cities such as through fibre to premises. TW responded that this is an option that is being explored. NSW TA has relationships with telecommunications providers who it will work with to further investigate these options. TW added that NSWTA provide the necessary technical information and analysis to inform potential infrastructure upgrade options. TW expressed understanding that communities in the region would like the same connectivity as capital cities and explained that a number of steps are required to achieve improved connectivity, with the first being identifying areas for improvement and funding opportunities.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TW reiterated that the purpose of this discussion with the CRG is to understand what people want so that the EnergyCo can identify next steps. TW explained that EnergyCo has engaged the team at NSW TA as they understand what technologies and services are available to support this work. • AL acknowledged there are gaps in NSWTA's understanding of the telecommunications issues affecting communities in the Central-West Orana region and is engaging today to better understand the impacts to ensure actions and outcomes are relevant and beneficial. • MD: Is it necessary that NSWTA is involved? DF responded that NSWTA does not have to be involved but is working to support EnergyCo. TW added that there is no statutory requirement for its involvement, however, EnergyCo has commissioned NSWTA to carry out this work as it has relationships with telecommunication providers and the technical ability and capacity to provide and deliver the projects and outcomes. • MD: Is EnergyCo paying NSW TA? TW confirmed EnergyCo is providing funding to NSWTA to support its investigations. • DF stated that the Central-West Orana REZ project provides base stations to the network and the role of NSWTA is to provide a cost-effective solution to attract providers. • MD stated that giving money to NSW TA will not mean suppliers will not put equipment on towers. TW responded that EnergyCo does not yet have a proposal for a neutral tower which is why this work is being carried out. TW added that due to the technical elements involved in this work, EnergyCo need a partner to explore these options which is why we are working with different government agencies to deliver a coordinated outcome. • MD noted that improving mobile phone reception in the REZ should be a priority investment for EnergyCo as it is a top priority for communities. • DM: Has EnergyCo considered running fibre through the easements? TW responded that EnergyCo is looking into this. AL added that NSWTA is investigating a number of telecommunications improvements that are cost effective and not just limited to towers.
7.3	Discussion 2 - Please share us what you would use better connectivity for in the future.	IF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IF introduced the second discussion topic and asked for feedback. • MD: Shouldn't NSWTA already have this data? Why this question is being asked of the CRG? AL responded that NSWTA is looking into this data, but also want to engage with the community directly to better understand their views. DF added that NSWTA would like to hear ideas from CRG members about how best to continue engaging with the community about telecommunications improvements in the REZ. • MD noted that regional communities need all the services currently available in cities. • DF: What priorities would be on the list? • MD stated that improvements to mobile connectivity is key and Starlink could cover most of this. AL responded that Starlink can be expensive and sometimes has connectivity issues. DF added that Starlink is operated by an international provider and there are concerns over the quality of the connection if too many people use the service. DF reiterated that NSWTA is considering all options. • BK stated that people in the Central-West Orana region will pay for a service if they can be guaranteed reliable access and added it would be a huge improvement for these communities to have reliable access to the internet. DF responded that it is possible for more reliable services that are cheaper than Starlink to be offered.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MD stated that people have tried satellite, 4G modem, and mobile broadband with boosters, but Starlink has proved better internet than all of these options. • BS: Will the roll out of broadband be based on how close you are to the transmission lines? DF responded that within scope of project it will be more economic for carriers to provide connectivity nearby to the transmission lines, but once you get a network the cost of extending it will be cheaper. AL added that NSWTA is looking at connectivity across the Central-West Orana REZ. • BS: The 330kV transmission lines interfere with radio. Will there be other types of interference? AL replied that NSWTA has a team exploring risks of interference from transmission lines. • DM stated that he lives at Tooraweenah and does not have access to services that some other towns have. DM said he uses Skymesh and sometimes the service is poor. DM expressed concern that Skymesh bills will be the first to lapse due to the increasing demand banks are putting on the area.
7.4	Next steps	IF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AL explained that NSWTA want to hear from a diverse range of people and gain a better understanding of which community groups to speak to and how best to engage. AL reiterated that NSWTA's priority is improving connectivity and affordability in the region. • KH suggested gathering a group of people with diverse backgrounds, such as people who use telehealth and education to provide feedback. DF agreed that NSWTA would like to meet with these groups of people and reiterated the NSWTA want to engage with local community so they can better understand the issues. • KH noted that at least a couple weeks' notice would be needed to mobilise people and suggested late July or early August would be a good time for a further community meeting. LA added that NSW farmers delegate David Thorne is not present today and suggested it might be best to speak to DT about timing to align with farming routines. DF said the NSWTA would like to engage with people as soon as possible. • ACTION: NSWTA to advise once a further community information session / workshop is arranged so that CRG members have an opportunity to participate. • ACTION: NSWTA to review comments raised in the meeting chat and advise of any responses. • TW thanked everyone for their time. • AL stated NSW TA will be in contact through LA.
8	General business		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CK submitted comments prior to the meeting that one in 50 wind towers should be made a bit taller purpose built for telecommunications. Safety for workforce during construction and ongoing maintenance is crucial. CK noted that unless this was made a condition of approval it won't happen.
9	Meeting close		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting closed at 12:10pm. • LA thanked all for their attendance and contribution • Next meeting: Thursday 20th July, Dubbo – 11am start

Next meeting

Date: Thursday 20 July 2023

Time: 11am to 1pm

Venue: Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo

Future meetings

Date: Week beginning Monday 23 October 2023, Mudgee NSW

Action items from this meeting

No	Action	Responsibility	Due
1	NSWTA to advise once a further community information session / workshop is arranged so that CRG members have an opportunity to participate.	AL	As soon as arranged.
2	NSWTA to review comments raised in the meeting chat and advise of any responses.	AL	Response proposed for Q3 CWO REZ CRG – 20/7/23.