EnergyCo

Biodiversity

Central-West Orana REZ transmission project

September 2023

EnergyCo is delivering the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) to provide a clean, affordable and reliable power supply for energy consumers across NSW. The Central-West Orana REZ transmission project will involve the construction of new transmission lines, energy hubs, switching stations and related infrastructure. The new REZ network infrastructure will enable renewable energy from solar, wind and storage projects to be distributed to energy consumers across the State via the existing NSW transmission network.

Overview

The Central-West Orana REZ transmission project has been developed with the aim of avoiding and minimising impacts to biodiversity where possible and has been informed by detailed field investigations. We have taken a balanced approach to developing the transmission corridor, taking into account various constraints such as biodiversity, the presence of high value agriculture land, landowner sentiment, technical requirements, constructability and other considerations.

While we have made every effort to avoid areas of native vegetation when developing the transmission alignment, some loss of native vegetation is unavoidable. We will implement a range of measures to minimise and offset any impacts to biodiversity as a result of the project.

To minimise or reduce impacts to flora (plant life), we have:

- Relocated the northern connection across Spring Road, Elong Elong to avoid threatened ecological communities in the area.
- Located the corridor on previously disturbed land (such as roads, tracks, fence lines).
- Avoided placing transmission infrastructure in threatened flora habitats wherever possible.
- Developed vegetation-clearing strategies that avoid full clearing of the construction and/or operation area.

To minimise or reduce impacts to fauna (animal life), we have:

- Avoided placing the transmission route in identified breeding or threatened species habitats.
- Revised the corridor alignment to minimise impacts to the habitats of identified endangered species like the Regent Honeyeater.
- Located facilities in areas of low ecological and heritage impact.
- Avoided rocky and water habitats where possible, and areas known for species movement.
- Planned seasonal surveys to identify endangered species breeding habitats and foraging patterns to inform ongoing mitigation measures.

EnergyCo has prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project. For more information on how biodiversity will be managed, please view **Chapter 10: Biodiversity** of the EIS via EnergyCo's website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo.

Biodiversity assessment

The project's EIS includes a detailed assessment of biodiversity impacts in **Chapter 10: Biodiversity**. The EIS outlines:

- the existing environment of the study area, including native and exotic vegetation, threatened flora and fauna species, migratory species, aquatic ecology and groundwater dependent ecosystems
- potential impacts to biodiversity during construction and operation
- measures to avoid, minimise and mitigate impacts to biodiversity, including an overview of the biodiversity offset strategy.

The assessment of potential biodiversity impacts included a desktop review, detailed field investigation work and aerial photography to identify potential impacts to flora and fauna within the study area.

Managing impacts to biodiversity

Once operational, impacts to biodiversity from the REZ transmission project are expected to be minimal. However, construction of the project will require the removal of vegetation within the construction area, which will have impacts to native flora, fauna and vegetation communities. A range of measures will be implemented to manage, mitigate and avoid these impacts during construction and operation.

During the detailed design and pre-construction phases, sensitive biodiversity areas will be avoided when finalising the locations for project infrastructure, where feasible. This includes permanent transmission infrastructure as well as construction site offices, compounds and access tracks.

Ecologists will carry out ongoing assessments and field investigations to confirm the presence of certain species and the impact from proposed construction activities. This may result in changes to construction methodologies and/or using different equipment.

A Biosecurity Management Plan will be prepared to manage biosecurity risks during construction. The plan will include protocols such as cleaning vehicles, machinery, clothing and boots to remove pathogens, weed seeds and plant bodies.

All areas requiring vegetation removal and potential habitat disturbance during construction will be outlined in a Biodiversity Management Plan. The plan will identify 'no go' zones to be demarcated on site, such as retained vegetation, hollow-bearing trees, nests, burrows and other habitat features.

Pre-clearing surveys will be completed and wildlife relocated if required within proposed vegetation clearing areas. These surveys will identify fauna that may need relocation, mark out any biodiversity exclusions zones and ensure nest boxes are in place.

A Riparian Vegetation Management Plan will manage activities within vegetated riparian zones to minimise impacts to aquatic environments.

A Hollow and Nest Strategy will be developed to create nest boxes to provide alternative roosting and/or nesting habitat for fauna potentially displaced during vegetation clearing.

Project personnel will receive inductions, toolbox talks and targeted training on biodiversity protocols.

Bird diverters will be installed to reduce the likelihood of birds colliding with transmission lines and infrastructure.

Areas of cleared vegetation will be offset in line with the project's biodiversity offset strategy. Further details are provided on the next page.

Biodiversity offsets

Major infrastructure projects generally require biodiversity offsets to compensate for residual and unavoidable impacts on biodiversity caused by the project. If we can't provide enough compensation for biodiversity within the immediate project area, then it may be 'offset' in a different location with similar habitat and flora and fauna species. This may include parcels of land put forward for conservation measures by private landowners.

Biodiversity offsets are set out by the NSW Government under the Biodiversity Offset Scheme (BOS). More information can be found on the NSW Environment and Heritage website at environment.nsw.gov.au by searching 'Biodiversity Offsets Scheme'.

The biodiversity offset options identified for the REZ transmission project include:

- purchasing biodiversity offset credits
- establishing biodiversity stewardship sites on lands with like-for-like biodiversity values to those impacted by the project
- making a payment into the Biodiversity Conservation Fund
- alternative strategic offset outcomes.

Biodiversity offsets will be secured in stages to reflect the progressive delivery of the 500 kV and 330 kV transmission lines. The final offset requirements, strategy and proposed delivery approach will be confirmed following approval of the project, during detailed design and once the final construction area is confirmed.

Existing 330 kV transmission lines near Wellington.

About EnergyCo

The Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) is a statutory authority responsible for leading the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) under the NSW Government's Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap. For more information, visit our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/about-energyco.

Contact Us

For more information about the Central-West Orana REZ project, you can visit our website or contact the project team:

- cwo@energyco.nsw.gov.au
- 1800 032 101
- energyco.nsw.gov.au
- If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450** and ask them to call us on **1800 061 114.**

EnergyCo wants to hear what you think about our plans. If you have questions or want to give feedback, please get in touch with our team. You can find more information on our website by scanning the QR code or by visiting energyco.nsw.gov.au.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment / Neil Fenelon.