

Community engagement

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

EnergyCo is committed to working with local communities and key stakeholders as we develop the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project and the wider REZ as a whole.

We have been working closely with communities and stakeholders for the past two years to inform the development of the project, including consulting with landowners to refine the transmission study corridor and engaging with the community to receive feedback on the design of the transmission project.

Feedback received to date has been considered in combination with engineering and environmental studies to inform the design of the REZ transmission project.

For more information on community engagement for the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project and responses to feedback, please view **Chapter 5: Community and stakeholder engagement** of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) via EnergyCo's website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo.

Engagement milestones



Consultation to date

2020

In **Q4 2020**, a regional reference group was established by the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) to inform the preliminary design for the transmission corridor.

A First Nations working group was established to inform the development of general and region-specific guidelines for First Nations engagement and participation under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

Transgrid carried out community consultation in 2020 and 2021 on a preliminary study corridor for new transmission infrastructure in the Central-West Orana REZ.

2021

In **November 2021**, the Central-West Orana REZ was declared by the Minister for Energy. At this time, EnergyCo was appointed the Infrastructure Planner and assumed responsibility for engaging communities and stakeholders on the REZ transmission project.

2022

In **Q1 2022**, we announced a revised study corridor for the REZ transmission project. Six community information sessions were held in the region in addition to briefings with stakeholders and community groups.

In **June 2022**, we released a community feedback report outlining feedback received on the revised study corridor and EnergyCo's responses.

First Nations stakeholders were invited to become a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the project.

In **August 2022**, a community reference group was established which comprises community representatives and key stakeholders. The group meets quarterly to discuss the transmission project and other key topics in the REZ.

In **September 2022**, we held eight community information sessions in the region to support the release of the scoping report.

In **Q4 2022**, we held an online survey and interviews with landowners and stakeholder groups for the EIS Social Impact Assessment (SIA).

2023

In **Q1 2023**, we held three community information sessions and invited feedback via an online survey on community benefit initiatives for the REZ.

In **March 2023**, a working group was established with government agencies, local organisations and industry stakeholders to support training and workforce development outcomes for the REZ.

We began a program of monthly pop-up engagement sessions at local towns and events to increase our presence in the REZ.

In **April 2023**, we established the intergovernmental and council Central-West Orana REZ steering committee to coordinate REZ-wide impacts.

In **May 2023**, a second round of SIA interviews were carried out with First Nations representatives.

In **June 2023**, we published a community feedback report outlining the responses from the community survey on community benefit initiatives.

In **August 2023**, we invited feedback on a proposed amendment to the Central-West Orana REZ declaration which would increase the intended network capacity of the REZ to meet future energy needs.

Community engagement snapshot



3,700 community and stakeholder interactions since early 2022



23 pop-up engagement sessions held at local towns and events



15 community information sessions held at local venues in the region



300 meetings held with landowners, communities and local organisations



5,500 homes and businesses in our letterbox distribution area

Keeping communities informed

We use a variety of communication channels to help ensure communities receive information about the Central-West Orana REZ. This includes:



Project update newsletters and work notifications.



Publishing project information and tools on EnergyCo's website including:

- our latest project updates
- fact sheets
- an interactive map
- reports
- frequently asked questions
- upcoming engagement events.



Advertising in local and regional media outlets.



E-newsletters to registered community members and stakeholders.



Regular briefings with community groups and stakeholders.



Direct contact via regular meetings, email and phone calls with affected landowners for the REZ transmission project.



A dedicated project phone number and email address for enquiries.



Displaying information materials at local venues, such as council offices.



Media releases for project milestones and announcements.



Attend conferences, country shows and other regional events.

We understand different communication channels suit different people, which is why we use a variety of methods to engage with communities in the REZ.

We encourage people to subscribe for email updates to ensure they receive our latest information and announcements. More information can be found on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au.

How we've adapted in response to community feedback

We have invited community feedback on an ongoing basis to help inform our engagement approach as we develop the Central-West Orana REZ.

During the consultation on the revised study corridor for the REZ transmission project in 2022, we received key feedback from the community to increase our presence in the region. In response to this, we have:

- engaged a team of locally-based Place Managers to manage relationships with landowners and communities
- opened a project office at 155 Macquarie Street, Dubbo, so you can drop by and speak to the team
- implemented an ongoing program of monthly pop-up events at local towns and events to increase our visibility in REZ communities
- increased our project advertising in local media outlets.

We evaluate and review our engagement approach on a regular basis to ensure we are providing adequate participation opportunities and responding to community needs and expectations.

Working with key stakeholders

For the past two years, we have been working closely with key stakeholders including local councils, generators, government agencies and stakeholder groups to coordinate the development of the REZ.

Local councils

We meet regularly with councils to discuss the transmission project and the development of the Central-West Orana REZ. More than 100 meetings have been held with councils since early 2022. Key priorities we've heard from councils include:

- impacts of temporary workforce accommodation
- opportunities to create legacy benefits for housing
- impacts on council infrastructure and assets during construction, including roads and waste facilities
- council resourcing to manage interfaces with REZ projects
- funding opportunities.

In April 2023 EnergyCo established the Central-West Orana REZ steering committee to continue coordinating REZ-wide community benefits and strategies to manage cumulative impacts. The steering committee meets monthly on an ongoing basis.

Working groups and forums

To inform EnergyCo's approach to REZ wide planning, we have established the following working groups and forums to enable targeted engagement on specific topics:

- Community reference group
- First Nations working group
- Skills and workforce working group
- Central-West Orana REZ steering committee.

We also hold regular interface meetings with developers of proposed generation projects with planned connections to the REZ network.

First Nations engagement

EnergyCo is carrying out ongoing engagement with First Nations stakeholders as we develop the REZ with a commitment to delivering tangible benefits for First Nations people.

First Nations guidelines have been developed to ensure that the economic benefits of the energy transition are shared with local First Nations businesses and communities and provide support for First Nations people and communities to build skills and capacity to take advantage of opportunities into the future.

Late 2020	First Nations stakeholders engaged in the Central-West Orana REZ regional reference group. First Nations working group established to consult on the design of the First Nations guidelines.
Mid 2022	First Nations stakeholders invited to become a RAP for the REZ transmission project.
Mid 2022 to mid 2023	Consultation with RAPs and key First Nations community members to identify places of cultural value to inform the REZ transmission project EIS. This included 12 weeks of field surveys attended by RAPs.
Mid 2022 to present	Engagement with First Nations agencies on benefit initiatives for First Nations communities in the REZ.
Late 2022 to mid 2023	Focus group meetings to discuss First Nations heritage findings and finalise the heritage report for the EIS.
Mid 2023	SIA interviews carried out with First Nations representatives. First Nations working group re-engaged to discuss implementing the First Nations guidelines in the Central-West Orana REZ.



Dunedoo town centre.

What we've heard from the community

EnergyCo has received a range of community feedback and questions throughout the development of the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project. Key topics identified of interest or concern to the community are detailed below.

Construction

Disturbance of private land, disruption of social services and use of accommodation camps for the construction workforce.

Agricultural activities

Impacts to agriculture activities during construction and operation, including any restrictions on activities as a result of the easement.

Environment

Environmental impacts including vegetation clearing, bushfire risk, electric and magnetic fields and erosion, loss of heritage items and waste generation.

Workforce

Impact of the temporary workforce by creating a demand on social services such as health services.

Visual amenity

Visual impacts from transmission infrastructure.

REZ transmission project planning process

Clarification of the process for the development of the alignment including any alternatives considered.

Central-West Orana REZ planning and governance

REZ planning and governance including the need, approach and communication.

Consultation

Feedback to improve our consultation approach and consultation fatigue from the amount of development in the region.

Property impacts

Property impacts including acquisition, compensation and impacts to agricultural operations.

Socio-economic impacts

Socio-economic impacts including business impacts and community benefits.

How we are minimising impacts and providing benefits

EnergyCo has considered community feedback in the development of the REZ transmission project wherever possible, including to inform strategies to mitigate impacts during construction and operation and provide long-term community benefits.



Minimising construction impacts

EnergyCo has considered existing land use in the project area to mitigate impacts to private land during construction. This has included investigations into existing road networks and land access provisions, and listening to community feedback to inform workforce accommodation arrangements.



Environmental management

EnergyCo has carried out detailed investigations to ensure careful management of vegetation clearing, bushfire risk, erosion and sediment control, noise and vibration, heritage preservation and waste generation in the construction and operation of the project.



Planning for the incoming workforce

EnergyCo is working with key stakeholders including councils to provide temporary workforce accommodation solutions for the REZ transmission project which will:

- manage the increase in population from the incoming workforce
- attract economic benefits through property investment
- provide long-term housing solutions for communities in the REZ.



Landowner benefit payments

EnergyCo has established the Strategic Benefit Payment (SBP) Scheme which will provide host landowners with additional annual payments in addition to compensation under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*. More information on the SBP scheme is available on EnergyCo's website at energyco.nsw.gov.au.

Future engagement

EnergyCo will continue to engage with the community and stakeholders to inform the development of the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project and the wider REZ.

Response to submissions report

Following the exhibition of the EIS, EnergyCo will prepare a response to submissions report addressing the feedback received during the public exhibition and action taken to address any issues. The submissions report is planned to be submitted to the Department of Planning and Environment in early 2024.

Coordinating community benefits in the REZ

EnergyCo is continuing to engage extensively with key stakeholders, including local councils, major generators, stakeholder groups and government agencies, to help inform how the REZ can deliver positive outcomes for local communities.

While still in the early planning phases, a number of initiatives are under investigation that will help provide social and economic benefits to REZ communities. EnergyCo plans to update the community on benefit-sharing initiatives in late 2023.

Chapter 5: Community and stakeholder engagement of the EIS for the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project provides detailed information about EnergyCo's engagement approach, key stakeholders, and engagement and consultation carried out to date.

A detailed list of matters raised during community consultation and how these matters have been addressed is provided in **Appendix D: Engagement summary**.

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:

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🌐 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.

