

## Meeting minutes – Extraordinary Meeting Central-West Orana REZ Community Reference Group

Tuesday, 31 October 2023

11:06am to 1:03pm

Mudgee Arts Precinct, 90 Market Street, Mudgee NSW

### Attendance

Category	Attendees
<b>Independent Chair</b>	Lisa Andrews (LA)
<b>EnergyCo representatives</b>	Cleo Andrews, CWO Community & Stakeholder Lead (CA) Bridget Kelleher . CWO Senior Place Manager (BK) Megan Jones, CWO Community & Stakeholder Interface Manager (MJ) Sarah Barker, CWO Planning & Environment (SB) Claire Emerton, CWO Planning & Environment (CE) Peter Jones, CWO Technical Lead (PJ) Renee Ridley –Director Community and Place (RR) (online) Anissa Baiquni – CWO Senior Manager Community & Stakeholder (AB) (online)
<b>LGA Delegates</b>	Cr Richard Ivey, Dubbo Regional Council (RI) Deputy Mayor Cr Kathy Rindfleish – Warrumbungle Shire Council (KR)
<b>Community representatives</b>	Sally Edwards (SE) Dougald Morse (DM)
<b>Stakeholder groups</b>	David Thorne – NSW Farmers (Mudgee) (DT) Beverley Smiles – Central West Environment Group (BS) Rosemary Hadaway – Mudgee District Environment Group & Watershed Landcare (RH) Neville Maddock – RE-Alliance (NM) Grant Gjessing – Business Mudgee (GG)
<b>Invited guests</b>	N/A
<b>Apologies</b>	Cr Katie Dicker, Mid-Western Regional Council Mayor Matthew Dickerson, Dubbo Regional Council Michael Peachey Colin Kilby John Kelly Kate Hook (RE-Alliance)

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## Agenda items

Item	Details	Responsibility
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA
2	Welcome and housekeeping	LA / CA
3	Apologies	LA
4	Business arising from last meeting	LA
5	Declarations	LA
6	EIS Q&A	All
7	General business	LA
8	Next meeting	LA

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## Actions from previous meeting

Number	Action	Status
1	N/A	N/A

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
1	Acknowledgement of Country	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting opened at 11:06am.</li> <li>This meeting is being held on Wiradjuri country.</li> </ul>
2	Welcome and housekeeping	CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CA advised the purpose of this Extraordinary CRG Meeting is for Q&amp;A on the transmission project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Questions about broader REZ issues will be taken on notice and answered at future a CRG.</li> <li>CA introduced Claire Emerton and Sarah Barker, EIS/planning specialists and Peter Jones, technical lead.</li> <li>CA advised of changes to the community engagement team. Cara Inia has left project, new members include Megan Jones (based in Dubbo), Renee Ridley and Anissa Baiquni. CA and Matt Miller moving into roles supporting REZ coordination (i.e. SteerCo, community benefit initiatives).</li> <li>BS would like to acknowledge the relationship that has been made between current Comms team and the CRG. LA asked for this to be noted in minutes.</li> <li>SE stated changing the team mid-EIS engagement is poor timing.</li> </ul>
3	Apologies	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Katie Dicker (MWRC), Mayor Matthew Dickerson (Dubbo), Michael Peachey, Colin Kilby, John Kelly, Kate Hook.</li> </ul>
4	Business arising from last meeting	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>
5	Declarations	LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>
6	<b>EIS Q&amp;A</b>		
		LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE enquired about the assessment process for road upgrades and how can the community follow and understand which road upgrades will be determined through the EIS process and obtain more detail.</li> <li>SB advised the Traffic Control section of EIS sets out the proposed road/intersection upgrades such as Merotherie Road, corner of Spring Ridge Road/Dapper Road, Neeley's Lane, Golden Highway and Ulan Road. An Amendment Report will provide more detail on the extent and type of upgrades required.</li> <li>RI enquired whether there is a schedule/map with description of the specific road upgrades and when it might be available. SB advised this will be part of the response to submissions and Amendment Report, which will include a description of any changes from the EIS. This is expected to be available late February/early March 2024.</li> <li>SE stated putting changes in the Amendment Report removes the community's chance to have a formal response to the amendments.</li> <li>SB advised that the Department of Planning sets the reporting requirements and will determine if the amendments require public exhibition based on the type and scope of the changes to the project that have been outlined in the response to</li> </ul>

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<p>submissions and amendment report. LA commented that it is important to raise any issues now by putting it in an EIS submission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DT enquired as to whether engineering/flood studies for the proposed road upgrades have been done as the country contains black soil, and whether a causeway is needed on Merotherie Road. A wet season can make it difficult to get vehicles along Merotherie Road.</li> <li>• SB advised modelling of proposed upgrades has occurred, which is normal at this stage of the project. In terms of flooding and passage of water over the road, increasing the height of Merotherie Road for 1:100 flood event would result in embankments and is not being considered. PJ further advised that the project is at design concept stage, and it is not appropriate to raise the road height. The intention is to provide a road foundation that can support traffic and not deteriorate.</li> <li>• KR enquired as to who did the flood study and where it is available. SB responded that EnergyCo's consultants conducted detailed flood studies, which included detailed modelling around the Energy Hubs.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS enquired whether most of the information being discussed will be in a Traffic Management Plan.</li> <li>• SB advised there will be a construction traffic management plan which will include mitigation measures as well as address any applicable conditions of approval. The traffic management plan is a typical condition of approval, which is expected. It will apply during the construction of the project. EnergyCo and the Network Operator will engage with Councils on this when available.</li> <li>• BS asked for clarity around the decision making on what is going to happen to the roads and when it will be clear to the community what has been approved.</li> <li>• SB advised that roads to be upgraded as part of the project will be more clearly identified and assessed in the Response to Submissions / Amendment Report. The Traffic Management Plan sets out construction traffic management requirements, such as traffic controls, driver fatigue, how to engage with stakeholders for stringing over road. The construction Traffic Management Plan will be implemented by the Network Operator. <b>ACTION:</b> Issue Amendment Report to the CRG members when published.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DT, RI and BS enquired about transport / movement studies for transfer of REZ related equipment (such as turbine blades and other heavy items) along the Golden Highway, considering inclines, impacts of increased traffic flow and manoeuvrability (such as at Jerry's Plains).</li> <li>• SB explained EnergyCo is looking at Port to REZ route for Over Size Over Mass (OSOM) movements from a cumulative perspective. For EnergyCo's transmission project the OSOM movements relate to the synchronisers and condensers for the Energy Hubs. These loads can be handled over Denman Bridge and through Merotherie Road and Spring Ridge/Dapper Road once the roads are upgraded. Detailed design will look at new routes that may be needed. Blade lengths have been considered from a key pinch point perspective, TfNSW identified 25 pinch points that might need adjustment to enable movement of blades.</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PJ advised for a mass of 200 tonnes, 2 x prime movers at front and rear are needed for a 3-degree incline at a speed of 80 km/hr. Steeper inclines can be done with more prime movers or at a slower speed.</li> <li>• SB advised that CFGs have provided proposed vehicle moment numbers from Port to REZ for indicative construction traffic which is being discussed with EnergyCo and TfNSW. The cumulative impact assessment is based on public information, as per DPIE's Cumulative Impact Assessment Guideline. EnergyCo is investigating in consultation with TfNSW potential passing bays, where required. The number of movements will be regulated through National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR), i.e. movements to occur at night and/or daily movement limit.</li> <li>• PJ advised traffic considerations are from the Port [of Newcastle] to the Central-West Orana REZ, starts with laydown area at Newcastle Port.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SE and CA enquired about the definition of 'reference design' and steps in the design process.</li> <li>• SB explained 'reference design' is essentially a concept design, with enough detail to understand on the ground impacts. Starting with reference design is normal practice for infrastructure projects.</li> <li>• PJ reiterated concept [or reference] design is completed subject to further detailed design and studies. It is progressive enough to understand what is required to construct the project. AECOM has been engaged to provide a Concept Design up to this point. Once the Preferred Network Operator is appointed, EnergyCo will adopt their design, but it must with within the parameters of the concept design.</li> <li>• SE commented that it can be challenging for the community to fully picture the project, as there are lots of questions from concept design that won't be available until detailed design.</li> <li>• SB explained that infrastructure projects normally follow a strategic &gt; concept &gt; detailed design process. From a planning perspective sufficient design detail is needed in the EIS to inform impact analysis. If any changes are required that are inconsistent with what is approved, EnergyCo will need to seek further approval. EnergyCo acknowledges some elements might not be in the concept design.</li> <li>• BS enquired about when biodiversity impacts are considered in the design process and when the final offset strategy will be completed.</li> <li>• SB advised that the Biodiversity Conservation Act and the Biodiversity Assessment Method is very prescriptive in how biodiversity values are identified, which when assessed through the biodiversity offset calculator translate to biodiversity offset credits (offset liability). Conditions of approval typically include "caps" of clearing. If any changes are required that are inconsistent with the approval, then EnergyCo will need to obtain additional approval.</li> <li>• SB further advised that around 25% of areas were not able to be accessed to understand the plant community types and species/habitat. Surveys need to be done for final approval to fill the biodiversity survey gaps. Where surveys are not completed (e.g. due to land access restrictions) then presence is assumed. The updated survey data, and any remaining areas where there is assumed presence, will be calculated as the biodiversity offset liability required as part of the final approval. More information is not available at this EIS stage. EnergyCo is still in the process of discussing/negotiating offset options with landowners. More information will be provided on the proposed offsets in the RTS report.</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS enquired as to whether this be bedded down before going to the Federal Government.</li> <li>• SB advised EnergyCo is expecting to be in a better position to describe the offsets but may not have all offsets secured for Amendment Report. EnergyCo’s preference is for stewardship agreements.</li> <li>• BS commented that the EIS does not reference the easement through Wilpinjong National Park and the offset for the honeyeater. SB advised that the biodiversity offset method does not deal with what is referred to as ‘additionality’ (or ‘existing offsets’), however EnergyCo has committed to offsetting the offset which demonstrates an improved outcome. LA noted that BS’s question about offsets in Wilpinjong for the honeyeater has been missed in the question &amp; answer list.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SE asked for clarification of project information that appears to show differing details about the output of the REZ. Materials from the community engagement sessions show an increased output from REZ from 3GW to 4GW under stage 1, with generation capacity capped at 5.8 GW. Other information shows network or generation capacity reached by 2036 and other graphs show capacity delivered in 2027 or 2028.</li> <li>• PJ responded that the graphs have the most recent indicative 20 year forward plan for the REZ. There are a lot of unknowns about offsetting coal power. The EIS forecasts an earlier ramping up of the REZ than what is in this graph, assuming the REZ does achieve 6GW.</li> <li>• SE commented that the moving targets makes the information not transparent to the community about when those capacities and targets will be hit, and what stages of REZ development match those targets.</li> <li>• CA advised that 5.84 GW of generation capacity is confirmed for stage 1 of the REZ.</li> <li>• PJ explained that market for coal generation retirement is variable and impacts when to build new energy. EnergyCo is being asked for a future masterplan about future expansion and is receiving criticism that this has not been communicated yet. There are a few parameters impacting this, for example the expansion needs to be economically viable for generators to look to move into area. The Network Infrastructure Strategy on EnergyCo webpage, section 1.1 has diagrams and tables of generation capacity scenarios. There are different diagrams for incremental transmission capacity for future extensions, which are all subject to planning approval and regulatory approval. The Network Infrastructure Strategy is reviewed every two years. <b>ACTION:</b> CA will send a copy/link to the Network Infrastructure Strategy to CRG members.</li> <li>• DT asked if excess energy generation will go into storage and whether batteries require an additional EIS and who is responsible for these approvals.</li> <li>• PJ advised, ideally, yes, EnergyCo’s roadmap includes 2GW storage by 2030. Five of the CFGs are proposing BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems). EnergyCo is the proponent of the transmission infrastructure. Generators are responsible for their own project approvals. <b>ACTION:</b> CA will send a link to the EnergyCo Roadmap to CRG members.</li> <li>• DM asked if carbon credits been purchased for EnergyCo’s stage 1.</li> <li>• SB advised carbon offsets are not an approval condition. EnergyCo is required to offset its biodiversity offset liability which is calculated as credits. EnergyCo is proposing to discharge this liability through stewardship agreements, but where there are residual credits EnergyCo would look to purchasing any credits on the market, or via the Biodiversity Conservation Fund.</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE asked if Chris Swann still the project director.</li> <li>CA advised yes.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE asked about liability for farmers. EnergyCo encourages landowners to speak to proponents regarding liability, but these conversations are not going anywhere. Farmers' own insurers have said insurance can be extended up to \$40 million, but some of the surrounding projects are worth more than that.</li> <li>CA advised that the NSW Government has recognised the issue of increased public liability insurance costs, as referenced in the response to the NSW Agriculture Commissioner's review into renewable energy and agriculture (outlined in previous meeting minutes).</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE commented that 2 years to review delivery timeframes is too long and can this be reviewed.</li> <li>PJ explained that it can take up to 7 – 8 years to deliver transmission projects and EnergyCo is looking at it 10 years out. Appreciate certainty is wanted, there are many moving parts and lots of approving bodies, it is hard to provide more regular updates.</li> <li>CA explained that a common question is whether EnergyCo knows a delivery date for Stage 2 and is just not communicating it. Timing and scope of future stages has not been determined.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE commented that the community sometimes gets differing answers from EnergyCo and proponents about temporary workers accommodation. SE asked whether cumulative impacts only considered project by project and whether there are REZ, state or national level cumulative impacts threshold, for example, on threatened species.</li> <li>CA advised that generators are informed of all EnergyCo plans, including temporary workers accommodation. EnergyCo has a formal communication process with generators that is documented.</li> <li>SB explained that project proponents are required to mitigate impacts (such as noise, traffic impacts etc) for each individual project. Generators provide impact data following the Cumulative Impacts Guideline from DPE and this informs EnergyCo's impact assessment. From a water perspective, there are limits to drawing from groundwater, this is handled through water access licences and water sharing plans. Individual projects consider individual water requirements, and this is also managed through Water NSW. For roads, TfNSW, looking at REZ contribution to roads. Noise is dealt with given proximity to a project and impacts on certain receivers.</li> <li>RH commented that there are multiple generators and there does not seem to be a ceiling on impacts. CA suggested this matter is raised through an EIS submission.</li> <li>BS commented that the cumulative impact assessment report was good and identified known credits across generators and the transmission line. BS enquired whether a contiguous area of biodiversity offset is going to happen, as [apparently] Mike Young indicated this outcome at the first CRG meeting.</li> <li>SB explained that Biodiversity Conservation Science is looking at developing a Strategic Offset Delivery Agreement with EnergyCo. It will require a regulatory change to Biodiversity Conservation Act. Under the Agreement, the Taskforce would generate number of credits required for the project. EnergyCo recognises there is an opportunity to extend this for</li> </ul>

Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			renewable energy developments connecting to the project, but the regulatory amendment is needed before any other agreements are contemplated.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE enquired about the source of the baseline data used to inform EIS around workforce which stated 10% would be from the local study area, and 90% from NSW, and where the workforce will be drawn from given very low local unemployment rates.</li> <li>SB responded that this number is an estimate based on figures provided from the generators.</li> <li>PJ advised these are stretch targets and are connected to the commercial ability of the generator to deliver the project. Overseas workers may be used, the project developers would need to demonstrate there are not enough local workers. Given the lead time for project, it is seen as feasible to acquire and train a local workforce.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RH asked for clarification whether the \$128 million community benefits fund that was announced is additional funds or funds that are being brought forward.</li> <li>CA confirmed the fund is from Generator Access Fees, which is being brought forward so it is accessible to deliver local benefits earlier.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DT enquired about how heavy vehicles on local roads are being considered, particularly in wet weather conditions, and how private roads may be used when building the transmission line.</li> <li>SB confirmed that construction traffic routes have been identified including heavy vehicle routes, with an estimation of hourly and daily traffic movements and the impacts of new traffic movements. This is included in the EIS traffic assessment. Pre-condition surveys of the existing roads will occur and if roads dilapidate over time as a result of EnergyCo movements, there will likely be a requirement for maintenance. A post-project road condition survey will also occur. The EIS documents identify transmission line access points along the easement and any improvements required to access the easement, including operational and construction access.</li> <li>PJ advised that bog mats or tractor mats may need to be used if there is wet weather. Mapping for springs and black soil will be done. Works may be prioritised according to wet weather impacts. The ability to use helicopters to string wires is included in the EIS. The network operators have a construction boundary they will have to stay within (regarding use of private roads).</li> <li>DT sought clarification on how much concrete is in a wind turbine footing and what happens in the instance of digging into granite.</li> <li>PJ advised wind turbine footings are approximately 15 meters deep and 1.5m X 1.5m. The footing may only need to be 4-5 metres deep in the event of granite / hard rock.</li> <li>SB advised near Coolah there is lot of basalt and blasting may be needed to get through the solid rock.</li> </ul>
	<b>General Business</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SE enquired about the number of neighbouring landowners that had “accepted” an EIS meeting.</li> <li>BK confirmed a total of 29 meetings were offered, with 19 meetings accepted and held with those who neighboured an Energy Hub or were considered to have high visual impact and a couple with moderate impact. Of those meetings most</li> </ul>



Item	Description	Lead	Updates
			<p>are landowners who are proposed to host transmission infrastructure and a handful of those around the hubs are not landowners, but neighbours. All landowners proposed to host transmission infrastructure were contacted prior to the EIS going on exhibition and additional meetings have been held with those that requested.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DT enquired whether EnergyCo has been advising landowners to speak to legal advisors, as there is a landowner in Merotherie that got advice from their accountant and not a solicitor. BK confirmed all landowners who are proposed to be impacted by transmission infrastructure are strongly encouraged to engage a solicitor. These (reasonable) legal fees are reimbursed in accordance with the Just Terms Act.</li> <li>• DT enquired about a property owner with a formerly vacant house and now has people in the house, and the transmission line is right in front of the house. The property owner said that EnergyCo considered property to be derelict and that is why the transmission alignment is there. Mike Young has been spoken to about it.</li> <li>• BK advised that all dwellings have been considered for visual impacts. CA advised that further changes to the alignment that is outlined in EIS could still happen pending ongoing landowner discussions as part of the acquisition negotiation process. SE asked how to represent that one dwelling. SB advised to include it in an EIS submission.</li> <li>• BS enquired as to whether the visual impact photomontages were available at the EIS community drop-in sessions. CA confirmed yes they were.</li> <li>• SE commented that the photomontages did not depict vegetation clearing to make way for towers.</li> <li>• GG commented that there are concerns about workers camps and whether they involve or benefit any community. GG asked how workers accommodation can help with the local housing crisis as workers camps are a disassociated way of dealing with housing. This could be looked at it much more positive light. LA asked if Business Mudgee will put in a submission and GG responded not sure.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA advised that next CRG meeting date will be confirmed at a later date, noting that the response to submissions for the EIS will take some time. <b>ACTION:</b> LA to confirm next CRG meeting date.</li> <li>• SE enquired about the duration of the CRG meeting and if it is possible to include more things to discuss, and when the Community Benefit Fund framework is coming out. <b>ACTION:</b> Next CRG meeting to include an update on the Community and Employment Benefit Fund.</li> <li>• A longer meeting time was discussed to provide more time to cover more issues and make the travel time to attend the meeting more worthwhile. LA commented that online meetings may be considered. CA commented that when trying to do both online and in person, need to find good AV facilities. Better all online or all in person. <b>ACTION:</b> LA to confirm if next meeting will be online or in person.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting closed at 1:03pm.</li> </ul>

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## Action items

No	Action	Responsibility	Comments/updates	Status
1	Send Amendment Report to the group once published	LA		Open
2	Provide a link to the Network Infrastructure Strategy	CA	<a href="https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/network-infrastructure-strategy-nsw">https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/network-infrastructure-strategy-nsw</a>	Closed
3	Provide link to EnergyCo roadmap.	CA	<a href="https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/NSW%20Electricity%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap%20-%20Detailed%20Report.pdf">https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/NSW%20Electricity%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap%20-%20Detailed%20Report.pdf</a>	Closed
4	Confirm next CRG meeting date.	LA	Proposed late January/early February	Open
5	Next meeting to include an update on the Community and Employment Benefit Program.	MJ		Open
6	Confirm if next meeting will be online or in person.	LA		Open

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## Next meeting

Date: TBC

Time: TBC

Venue: TBC