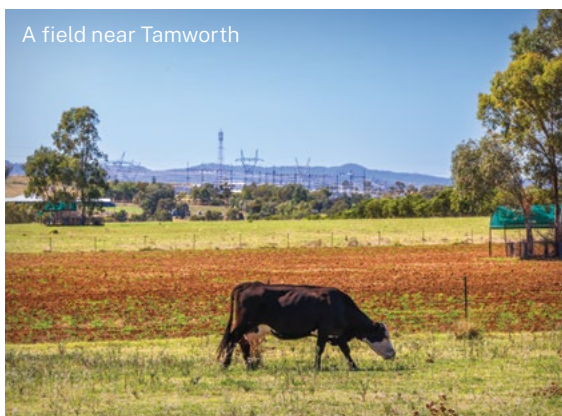
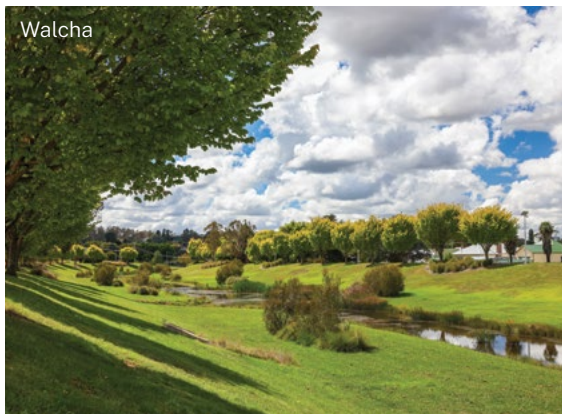


Environmental assessments

New England Renewable Energy Zone

July 2024

EnergyCo is leading the delivery of the New England REZ network infrastructure project to connect new renewable energy generation and storage in the REZ to the existing electricity network. EnergyCo is required to carry out a range of detailed assessments to inform the planning and approval process for the project.



Environmental assessment requirements for the REZ network infrastructure project

As Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI), the New England REZ network infrastructure project is required to follow a comprehensive assessment process under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act). This includes the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS includes a range of detailed assessments which identify the potential environmental, economic and social impacts of the project and the mitigation measures which would be implemented to avoid, minimise and/or mitigate these impacts.

The assessments required for a project's EIS are guided by the Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARs) which is issued following the release of a scoping report. EnergyCo lodged a scoping report for the REZ network infrastructure project with the Department for Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) in July 2024. We expect to receive SEARs for the project later in 2024.

For detailed information about the planning pathway for the REZ network infrastructure project, you can view the planning approval process fact sheet on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.



Community engagement session in Armidale

Assessments to inform an Environmental Impact Statement

The following assessments are generally required to inform an EIS for CSSI projects.

For more information about each assessment, you can read the standardised SEARs online at planning.nsw.gov.au.



Biodiversity

A **Biodiversity Development Assessment Report** will identify potential biodiversity impacts of the project and proposed mitigation measures. It will describe existing vegetation and animal species (flora and fauna) within the project area, including threatened species and ecological communities, and provide a detailed description of the avoidance, minimisation and offset framework implemented for the project.



Aboriginal cultural heritage

An **Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment (ACHA)** will describe the existing environment as it relates to Aboriginal cultural heritage and assess any potential impacts and mitigation measures. The assessment will involve survey by archaeologists and Registered Aboriginal Parties.

A **Cultural Values Assessment** will be carried out with the ACHA to document cultural values associated with areas and landscapes in the project area, including On-Country meetings with Aboriginal knowledge holders to capture oral history and areas/features of cultural value.



Non-Aboriginal heritage

A **Non-Aboriginal Heritage Assessment** will assess non-Aboriginal heritage relating to the existing environment, potential impacts on historical heritage items, and mitigation measures. The assessment will identify listed heritage items located within or near the project. Field surveys will be carried out to identify items, buildings, structures, or other features of potential historical heritage significance.



Social and community

A **Social Impact Assessment (SIA)** will be carried out to understand the characteristics and values of communities and potential social impacts in the project area. It will include targeted consultation with community groups and members, in the form of surveys, interviews and meetings to understand community views, perceptions and experiences.

The SIA will consider changes or impacts to people's way of life, local community, ability to access or use infrastructure, services or facilities, health and wellbeing, culture, livelihoods, surroundings and decision-making systems. The SIA will also identify strategies to minimise, address or manage social impacts and opportunities, and will consider potential cumulative social change in the region.



Land use

Potential land use and impacts will be assessed including potential impacts to agricultural land, commercial, mining and industrial operations, protected environments and biodiversity offset areas.



Visual amenity

A detailed **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** will be carried out

to assess the landscape character and potential visual impacts of the project. The assessment will consider public and private viewpoints, the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receivers, and assess the visual impact of any changes as a result of the project. It will consider community feedback about key landscape features, areas of scenic quality and key public viewpoints valued by the community.



Agriculture and soils

An **Agriculture and Soils Assessment** will be carried out to assess construction

and operation activities which may impact soil and agricultural operations and identify mitigation measures. The assessment will consider the project's impact on Biophysical Strategic Agriculture Land, Critical Industry Clusters (equine and viticulture) and land and soil capability.



Groundwater

A **Groundwater Impact Assessment** will assess existing boreholes, groundwater

users and groundwater dependent ecosystems that could potentially be impacted by the project and identify mitigation measures.



Noise and vibration

A **Noise Impact Assessment** will assess potential noise and vibration impacts from

the project. It will include a prediction of construction and operational noise and noise associated with road traffic and potential workforce accommodation sites and identify mitigation measures.

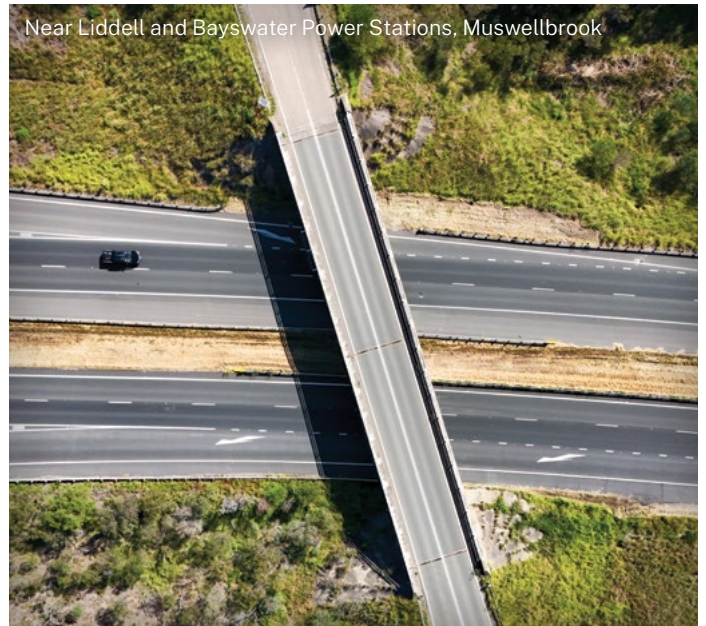


Hazards and risk

An **Aviation Impact Assessment** will assess potential impacts to aviation

operations including consideration of aerodromes, landowner aircraft landing areas, emergency helicopter access, aerial baiting and culling, and aerial application of agricultural fertilisers and pesticide, and proposed mitigation measures.

A **Bushfire Assessment** will be carried out to consider potential risks to public safety, property and project infrastructure and identify mitigation and management measures. Other key potential hazards and risks assessed as part of the EIS include electromagnetic fields, dangerous goods and hazardous materials, and land contamination.



Near Liddell and Bayswater Power Stations, Muswellbrook



Economic

An **Economic Impact Assessment** will assess potential economic benefits and impacts

from the project. It will consider the New England and Upper Hunter economies and key industries and assess potential impacts of the project during construction and operation as it relates to employment, non-labour expenses and impacts on other industries, including agricultural land uses.



Traffic and transport

A **Traffic and Transport Assessment** will consider potential traffic and transport

impacts generated by the project including potential impacts to routes and access during construction and operation, and traffic impacts to the surrounding road network.



Hydrology, water and flooding

A **Surface Water Impact Assessment** will assess potential hydrology, water quality and

flooding impacts from the project, as well as provide details of project water demand and proposed water supply for construction and operation and identify management measures.



Air quality

An **Air Quality Impact Assessment** will assess potential impacts on air quality

from the project including activities and sources of air emissions that may impact air quality during construction and operation. The assessment will also identify mitigation measures to minimise the potential impacts to air quality during construction.



Greenhouse gas and climate change

A **Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change Assessment** will identify the likely sources of greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction of the project and identify opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change risks will be considered within relevant technical reports, including the assessment of bushfire and flooding impacts.



Waste management and resource use

An assessment of potential waste management and resource use will identify potential waste streams generated during construction and operation, management practices to avoid or minimise waste including material reuse and recycling measures, and disposal practices. The assessment will identify the types and sources of resources expected for construction and operation.



Cumulative impacts

The potential cumulative impacts of the project will be assessed in line with the requirements of the *Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Projects (DPE, 2022)*. The assessment will consider future proposed projects which could contribute to cumulative impacts in the region. Cumulative matters will also be considered in each technical assessment.



REZ-wide cumulative impact studies

EnergyCo is carrying out studies for priority topic areas in the New England REZ to assess potential cumulative impacts from the network infrastructure project and the wider REZ as a whole.

The studies will help inform the cumulative impact management measures identified in the EIS. For more information about EnergyCo's REZ-wide cumulative impact studies please read our fact sheet on delivering benefits in the New England REZ at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Next steps

Throughout 2024 and 2025 we will continue to carry out technical assessments, including field investigations and consultation with landowners and the community, to refine the design and develop the EIS for the New England REZ network infrastructure project. We expect to lodge the EIS with DPHI for public exhibition and assessment in late 2025.

Contact us

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.



nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au



1800 061 114
(9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)



energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne



Scan the QR code for more information.



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**.