

## New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

### Community Reference Group (CRG) North - Meeting 1

Held on: Thursday 23 January 2025 – 11.30am to 2:00pm

At: NOVA, 122 Faulkner Street, Armidale

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

#### Attended

<b>Chairperson</b>	Margaret Harvie
<b>Community Representatives</b>	Diane Gray Alex Hunter Annette Kilarr Tony Lashlie Bruce McMullen James Reilly Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha
<b>LALC Representatives</b>	
<b>LGA delegates</b>	Walcha Council - Councillor Rachael Greig Armidale Regional Council - Councillor Dorothy Robinson Uralla Shire Council – Councillor Sarrah Burrows Inverell Shire Council – Councillor Kate Dight (Mayor)
<b>EnergyCo Representatives</b>	Julian Watson, New England Deputy Project Director Mim Balcombe, New England Communications and Engagement Director Melissa Maurer, New England Place Manager
<b>Note taker</b>	Kate McGrath

#### Apologies

Glen Innes Severn Council – Councillor Margot Davis (Mayor)

#### Declarations of interest

Diane Gray - Business NSW Regional Director New England North West and member organisations of Business NSW have a financial interest or potential financial interest in the REZ.

Sarah Burrows- Landholder of property within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.

Margaret Harvie – Independent Chairperson, engaged by EnergyCo. Has a training program attended by companies that are proponents of renewable energy projects.

Other potential interests

Dorothy Robinson – Sapphire Wind Farm investor

Kate Dight – Host for FRV Metz Solar Farm

Kate McGrath - Employment Facilitator for the New England North West Local Jobs Program which provides funding and support for workforce development in the renewables sector. Also Sapphire Windfarm investor.

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## Agenda item discussion and actions

### Item 1. Acknowledgement of Country

- The Chairperson acknowledged that we are meeting on Aboriginal land, and paid respects to Elders past, present and emerging.
- Meeting opened 11.32am

### Item 2. Welcome and housekeeping

- Chair welcomed members and outlined structure of meeting
- Chair called for questions about agenda
- Chair highlighted CRG purpose and objectives

### Item 3. Introductions and declarations

- Chair introduced herself and explained role as independent Chair
- EnergyCo staff introduced themselves, their roles in the project, and previous experience
- Members introduced themselves, their interest in participating in the CRG, and previous experience
- Declarations as listed

### Item 4. Apologies

- As listed

### Item 5. Governance and administration

- Local Councils, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, and Voice for Walcha are the organisational members of the CRG. This means that they can send a proxy or swap representatives, all other members are appointed as individuals.
- Meet four times a year, flexibility regarding time and location to suit participants
- Suggestion that our meetings alternate between Armidale and Uralla/ Walcha.
- **Action: Next meeting to be held in Uralla/ Walcha**
- Members are expected to attend minimum of 75% of meetings per year, attendance in person is ideal but online facilities can be provided as required.
- Draft agenda to be distributed 2 weeks beforehand to allow time for inclusion of additional items, and all members are invited to suggest items for the agenda

- Meeting notes will be provided, not verbatim minutes, and only actions will be attributed to individuals
- Meeting notes to be completed and distributed within a week for review
- Members given 5 business days to review draft minutes and can provide feedback to Chair before notes are finalised for placement on the website by EnergyCo
- Member names and email addresses are to be published on EnergyCo's website
- Suggestion for all meeting notes to be shared between South CRG and North CRG to support information sharing and conversation between stakeholders
- **Action: Link to the North and South meeting notes on EnergyCo site to be sent to all members when they are finalised**
- Any further correction of errors in the meeting notes published on the website can be addressed at the subsequent meeting
- Presentations made to the CRG will not necessarily be made publicly available
- **Action: Clarify process for publishing and publicly sharing presentations to the CRG**

#### Item 6. Terms of Reference

- Chair explained proposed changes to Terms of Reference that were distributed
- Changes to the Terms of Reference included the following:
  - Reduction to the number of community reps from 10 to 7
  - Clarification that it is only one rep of each of the Councils and Local Aboriginal Land Councils
  - Inclusion/ strengthening of pecuniary interest statement for further clarity
  - Increase of maximum membership from 16 to 18 people for the North CRG to enable 7 community members and one rep from all councils and LALCs.
  - Removal of line to state members could not speak to media, amended to state that members are able to make comment but are not permitted to speak on behalf of the CRG or EnergyCo
- **Action: Members accepted the changes to the Terms of Reference as presented, new ToR to be distributed with meeting notes.**
- All relevant declarations will be included in each and every meeting notes and appropriately documented
- Members can share published meeting notes and are encouraged to be mindful about sharing accurate information

- Request for EnergyCo and Chair to explicitly state if any information shared with CRG is not appropriate for public sharing
- No information pertaining to individuals to be shared by EnergyCo to CRG or from CRG to public, in accordance with privacy requirements
- Request for members to re-sign Code of Conduct document
- **Action: Members to sign updated Code of Conduct document – this occurred at the meeting**
- **Action: Members that have not done so (some local government reps) need to sign Declaration of Interest form**

#### Item 7. Project overview

- Presentation from EnergyCo outlining NSW energy transition
- Discussion regarding generators and generation design partners, capacity to deliver the planned or required amount of energy, and adaptation within the sector and for this region.
- Discussion regarding EnergyCo interactive map and need for increased clarity of the information that is being provided
- Project overview included explanation of the transmission corridor and requirement for enabling ancillary infrastructure, such as upgrade of highways, to minimise impact on community
- Route selection process information is available on EnergyCo website
- Discussion regarding whether the corridor evaluation and changes is “trackable,” and although changes are routinely published, the decision-making process is internal
- EIS to be published later this year
- Approval pathway overview provided
- Discussion regarding a group of Uralla landholders who have co-operated with each other to determine best location of the transmission lines. Their approach was to engage collectively with EnergyCo around finding solutions suitable to landholders and EnergyCo. This might be an example for others.
- **Action: Share image renders of hub and towers that were included in Central West Orana REZ EIS document (<https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/environmental-impact-statement>: Photo montages for Central West Orana are available at the bottom of this page)**
- Discussion regarding visual amenity and visual impact as part of assessment process, challenging to consider as part of the design process due to market limitations and discretion of successful network operator (that is in choice of towers etc.)
- **Action: Confirm with relevant EnergyCo team members if international examples of monopoles are suitable for NEREZ**
- Field evaluation involves 12,000 hectares to survey, of this approximately 10,500 hectares have been completed

- Competitive tender process will begin this year, market update was provided late December 2024 advising the market of the procurement process
- Discussion regarding local labour force and specialised technical skills
- **Action: Confirm current rate of build across Australia, and projected build rate**
- Feedback regarding information sessions, request for a session to be held at Walcha
- **Action: Follow up on potential information session in Walcha**
- Councillor briefings are planned by EnergyCo involving all Councils directly impacted by the REZ
- Range of resources available on EnergyCo website. Some changes to interactive map have been made based on user feedback
- Specific suggestions on how to improve EnergyCo website are invited
- Discussion regarding EnergyCo presence at markets and shows. Regular presence in impacted communities is designed to build community capacity to engage and ask questions and provide information to the broader community.
- **Action: Include agenda item discussing better ways to engage and share information**
- **Action: Email suggestions for how communication can be improved**
- Overview of Legislative Assembly inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales. Submissions close on 31 January 2025.
- **Action: Share link for Legislative Assembly inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales to members**
- **Action: Group email thread to be established as all emails will be shared by Chairperson in distribution of the meeting notes and other relevant emails to the group.**
- **Action: Share guide to submissions from Nature Conservation Council with all members**
- Overview of coordination for delivery of the REZ:
  - Project management is not limited to technical aspects and must consider impacts and keep a range of agencies informed for planning considerations in workforce planning, population movements, housing and accommodation.
  - REZ wide studies are part of a whole of government approach to understand priority areas and to identify opportunities for community benefits and managing impacts of the REZ
- Discussion regarding how cumulative impact is measured, and the specific commitment is from EnergyCo to identify opportunities, in particular in health and education

- **Action: Agenda item for EnergyCo to give update on REZ coordination and community benefit**
- The Consumer Trustee (CT) is an independent role appointed by the Minister for Energy under the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020.
- AEMO Services Limited (ASL), a subsidiary of the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), has been appointed as the CT to protect the long-term financial interests of NSW electricity consumers. AEMO website on ASL: Our Role. The CT is a regulator that ensures the REZ project and expenditure is appropriate. EnergyCo works closely with the Consumer Trustee to look after the long-term financial interests of NSW electricity customers to improve the affordability, reliability, security and sustainability of electricity supply.
- Discussion regarding misinformation regarding the purpose of Council payments, and clarification of EnergyCo's commitment to support the burden on Councils of additional planning work for roads, housing and infrastructure planning
- Community and Employment Benefit Program funds have been distributed through a competitive grant application process in other areas. The funding program for the New England will be tailored to suit the needs of the region and therefore may be a different model.
- Suggestion for CRG to have input into the Community and Employment Benefit Program, including funding allocation. It was clarified that the CRG will not be determining allocation of funds but will be part of the consultation about community benefits, including employment.
- Suggestion for agenda item about learnings taken from Central West Orana benefit program and possible improvements and opportunities for legacy investment

#### Item 8. First Nations engagement

- LALCs have a standing invitation to attend CRG
- EnergyCo has established a separate working group specifically for First Nations stakeholders through the Roadmap
- Standing agenda item for EnergyCo to update the CRG on First Nations initiatives

#### Item 9. Lunch

#### Item 10. Questions and general business

- Information shared about State Government 'The Welcome Experience' program to attract skilled health professionals to the region
- Discussion regarding cost benefit across environmental, social and economic domains
- Need to consider the needs of smaller towns that are different from the needs of regional centres.

- Concern raised regarding use of Thunderbolts Way and potential damage. Discussions occurring between key stakeholders, and clarity needed regarding who is responsible for repair, maintenance and upgrades of the roads
- Concern regarding cumulative impact of projects
- **Action: CRG to include agenda item to look at cumulative impact of hubs, projects and REZ**
- Concern raised about housing shortages
- Concern raised about risks to water security from increased population
- Suggestion that the CRG have a role to advocate for improved communication
- Concern raised about the impact of fly-in fly-out workforce during construction phase
- Comment regarding opportunity to train young people, encourage them to stay in the local area and meet need for local skill development
- Suggestion CRG should be a conduit for sharing information and improve level of energy literacy across communities
- Comment regarding an expectation that state government takes a great role in guiding EnergyCo and proponents to address problems and plan for impact, there is a need to support communities to not be overwhelmed
- Concern raised about communities already facing health staff shortages and need for additional professionals
- Suggestion that EnergyCo needs to provide all of their own facilities, health staff and other requirements (such as water) if they intend to allow for a fly-in fly-out workforce
- Concern raised about the need for developers to pay for damage to roads as part of the contributions
- Request to consider upgrading the rail to allow for transport of infrastructure
- Suggestion to consider modular homes as a potential solution for increased population
- Suggestion that community benefits allow for low-cost energy for communities
- Agreement for areas of interest and concern to be clearly communicated as future agenda items
- Comment that CRG must keep sight of the fact that this transition is to protect the environment and keep our communities alive

## Item 11. Next meeting

To be determined

Action	Responsible	Status
Next meeting to be held in Uralla or Walcha	Chair	
Link for North and South meeting notes on EnergyCo site to be sent to all members when they are finalised	Chair	
Clarify process for publishing and publicly sharing presentations	Melissa Maurer	
New accepted Terms of Reference to be distributed with meeting notes	Chair	
Members to sign updated Code of Conduct document	CRG Members	Completed for those at the meeting – all future members to do the same
Members that have not done so need to sign Declaration of Interest form	Melissa Maurer/ Chair	
Share image renders of hub and towers included in Central West Orana REZ EIS document	Mim Balcombe	<a href="https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/environmental-impact-statement">https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/environmental-impact-statement</a> at the bottom of the page is a gallery of the photomontages. The Visual Impact Assessment specialist study appendix also contains many photomontages.
Confirm with relevant EnergyCo team members if international examples of monopoles are suitable for NEREZ	Julian Watson	
Confirm current rate of build across Australia, and projected build rate	Julian Watson	
Follow up on potential information session in Walcha	Melissa Maurer	



Action	Responsible	Status
Include agenda item discussing better ways to engage and share information	Chair	
Email suggestions for how communication can be improved	CRG Members	Email requesting this information sent to CRG members
Share link for Legislative Assembly inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales to members	Chair	Complete as part of email sent
Group email thread to be established as all emails will be shared by Chairperson in distribution of the meeting notes and other relevant emails to the group.	Chair	Email sharing email addresses sent 24 January
Share guide to submissions from Nature Conservation Council with all members	Chair	Guide sent to all members in email 24 January
Agenda item for EnergyCo to give update on REZ coordination and community benefit	Melissa Maurer	
CRG to include agenda item to look at cumulative impact of hubs, projects and REZ	All	

## Other comments

Some of the suggested agenda items for future meetings captured from the discussion:

- Better ways for EnergyCo to engage and share information
- Update on REZ coordination and community benefit program
- Consideration of solutions to housing and accommodation shortages

- Workforce planning
- Shortage of primary health professionals
- Measurement of cumulative impact
- Water security
- Communication and engagement
- Community and Employment Benefit Program
- Learnings from Central West Orana REZ including community benefits
- Roads and local community infrastructure
- Cumulative impact of hubs, projects and REZ

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### Upcoming meetings

Based on information provided availability of CRG members is later part of April.

Meeting likely to be 30 April or 1 May – to be confirmed

Meeting closed 2.37pm