

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Community Reference Group (CRG) South - Meeting 2

Held on: Wednesday 30 April 2025 – 5.00pm to 7.30pm

At: Passchendale Room, Tamworth Town Hall, Fitzroy St Tamworth

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

Attended

Chairperson	Margaret Harvie
Community Representatives	Ninna Douglas Kate Whitehead Linda Taylor Brigitte Thomas* Robert Warren Mark Eather – Valley Alliance
LALC Representatives	Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council – Noel Downs Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council – De-Anne Douglas*
LGA delegates	Upper Hunter Shire Council – Councillor Adam Williamson Muswellbrook Shire Council – Mayor Jeff Drayton*
EnergyCo Representatives	Julian Watson, New England Deputy Project Director Michael Burden, New England REZ Coordination Director Cleo Andrews, New England Communications and Engagement Lead Sara Crowe, New England Community Engagement Manager Melissa Maurer, New England Place Manager Leanne Thompson, First Nations Advisor
Note taker	Kate McGrath
*Online attendance	

Apologies

Declarations of interest

Member	Details
Kate Whitehead	Pecuniary interest: Acting for Upper Hunter Shire Council in relation to the Maizewood Battery Energy Storage System Project at Aberdeen, NSW. Potentially acting for a landholder in negotiations with a Turnbull Renewables entity in relation to the proposed Scott Creek Windfarm located at Willow Tree, NSW.

Mark Eather	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Brigitte Thomas	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Robert Warren	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Linda Taylor	Pecuniary interest: MBC Recruitments intend to tender for paid recruitment contracts.
Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council – Noel Downs	Pecuniary interest: Nungaroo land may be included in the transmission line corridor
Kate McGrath	Non-pecuniary interest: Kate is the Employment Facilitator for the New England North West Local Jobs Program which provides funding and support for workforce development in the renewables sector. Pecuniary interest: Investor in Sapphire Windfarm.
Margaret Harvie	Non-pecuniary interest: Margaret has advised generators on community engagement and delivers a community engagement training course which generators participate in.

Agenda item discussion and actions

Acknowledgement of Country

- The Chair acknowledged that we are meeting on Aboriginal land, paid respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Energy Corporation of NSW acknowledgement was on the PPT presentation.

Welcome and housekeeping

- Chair welcomed members and outlined structure of meeting.

Review previous actions

While some of the actions were just points of communication there was discussion in the meeting on a number of topics and this is covered, where relevant, in a text box below the actions.

	Action	Responsible	Status
1.	New ToR to be distributed with meeting notes.	Chair	Complete. Sent via email on 04/02/2025.

	Action	Responsible	Status
2.	Members to sign updated Code of Conduct document	CRG Members	Complete. Completed at meeting.
3.	Members that have not done so need to sign Declaration of Interest form	CRG Members	Ongoing. To be completed by 30 April 2025.
4.	Follow up with property manager regarding correct spelling of name and attention to owners' detail in communication	Julian Watson	Complete. Communicated to property lead and to be shared again in Comms/Property meeting on 16 April 2025.
<p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The correct spelling of names is not the only issue and was seen as trivialising the extent of the concern about poor communication. There is a sense that responses to concerns about property entry have led to characterisation of landholders as uncooperative. Landowners have found that changing staff and management has impacted relationships due to lack of continuity and in particular confusion of transition between place manager and acquisition managers. There was encouragement from EnergyCo for concerns and issues to be raised with EnergyCo Place Manager directly. Perception that communication issues are not isolated, and it is considered that improvement is needed. Comment that consultation with Aboriginal community historically occurs too late in the process. <p>Action: Check back with members re attention to detail and timeliness of EnergyCo communication and engagement</p>			
5.	Provide further information to explain why EnergyCo (the NSW government) is not planning underground transmission lines	Julian Watson	Response provided at the meeting
<p>Overhead transmission lines are standard practice for large-scale network infrastructure projects like the New England REZ. They are more practical from an engineering and cost perspective, with greater</p>			

flexibility in design and lower environmental and land use impacts. They are also easier to maintain, which is critical for network reliability.

In contrast, underground lines can cost up to 10 times more, are less efficient due to heat loss, and require significant land disturbance for installation and maintenance. They also permanently restrict land use along the easement.

The NSW Government recently investigated the cost, logistics and feasibility of undergrounding new transmission infrastructure. More information is available [here](#).

Discussion:

- Question regarding length of overhead transmission lines required for the project and associated price.

Response: There is approximately 400km of transmission lines and a price estimate is not confirmed and therefore cannot be publicly disclosed.

- Comment from CRG member that Syncline Energy are going to do underground transmission and, on this basis, challenged the cost difference between above ground and underground transmission. Comment that impact on agriculture and fire considerations should factor into the comparative non-financial cost.

Response: From EnergyCo that undergrounding is considered for some transmission projects where it is technically feasible, environmentally appropriate, and cost justified. However, it is not always suitable and is not proposed for the project due to significantly higher costs, longer construction timeframes, and greater environmental and engineering challenges compared to overhead lines.

- Comment from CRG member that Syncline Energy only require 8m easements.

Response: from EnergyCo that the Syncline project includes High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission rather than standard High Voltage Alternating Current (HVAC). The easement for the New England project would be wider than 8m, increasing impacts on the land. EnergyCo advised the project design, environmental assessment and route arrangements were well progressed.

- EnergyCo advised overhead transmission lines were standard practice for high-voltage transmission projects, delivering more cost-efficient infrastructure with reduced environmental impact.
- A CRG member objected to the assertion that overhead lines are considered the norm and stated that the benefits of undergrounding outweighed increased costs.

Response: From EnergyCo that the impact of undergrounding transmission lines has on landscape is significant and if it was economically and environmentally viable it would be under consideration. Reiteration that a NSW Government inquiry determined overhead transmission lines are acceptable.

- Comment from CRG member that finances and costings should be made publicly available to verify assertion that cost of undergrounding is not viable.

Response: from EnergyCo that comparative estimates are considered but not fully costed to a detail design level for options that are not being progressed. Current planning and timelines

	Action	Responsible	Status
	<p>for construction are based on overhead lines and underground lines are not being considered or costed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment from CRG members that transmission lines are going through Category 1 bushfire zones and lines created limitations to aerial and on ground supports. 		
6.	More detailed information to be provided about the biodiversity impacts of the project and the planned biodiversity offsets in response to the impacts	Julian Watson	To be included in agenda for CRG meetings in June/July 2025.
	<p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question from CRG member if the design was formulated with reference to an Environmental Impact Assessment. <p>Response: That Environmental Impact Statement is currently being prepared and there are a range of changes to design that have and will be made in response to the outcomes of the assessments.</p> Question from CRG member of who is completing the development of the EIS. <p>Response: Lead contractor is overseeing a suite of specialist subcontractors for the EIS including specialist studies in biodiversity, social impact, noise, traffic and transport, water, accommodation, heritage, contamination, Aboriginal heritage and culture, and other requirements. A scoping report has been submitted to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and the Department has issued the Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARS), which outline the information that needs to be included in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).</p> Concern was raised by a CRG member about the Biodiversity Assessment Method used by NSW government, considered not to be suitable for large scale assessment. The concern was that it is unlikely to give an appropriate overview of actual impact. <p>Response: That the requirements for the assessment are determined by DPHI. The EIS process is ongoing, and discussions will occur through the process.</p>		
7.	Invite EnergyCo specialist to attend CRG to present to members about the biodiversity impacts of the project and the plan for offsets, including the methodology.	Julian Watson	To be included in agenda for CRG meetings in June/July 2025.
	<p>Action: Questions for biodiversity specialists to be emailed through to Chair prior to meeting if possible.</p>		

	Action	Responsible	Status
8.	Both North and South groups are to be notified when the meeting notes are published on the website.	Chair	Complete. Sent via email on 19/02/2025.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion about actions and the need for assigned timeframes for actions, and the need for transparency. Confirmation that the aim is to close all actions by next meeting. <p>Action: Actions will be numbered and assigned a timeframe for delivery.</p> <p>Action: New actions or requests received outside of meetings will be added to the register to ensure updates are shared and progress is tracked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for the meetings to be recorded. Response: No plan to record as it will limit the opportunity for free-flowing conversation. Detailed meeting notes are provided for transparency and provided to members for comment to ensure discussions are documented accurately. Question to Chair if the CRG is abiding by the IAP2 code of ethics. Response: The CRG is guided by the IAP2 principals and aligns with its code of ethics. CRG member requested for a vote to be taken regarding the recording of the meeting. Also belief stated that if the broader community aren't reading the meeting notes, then there shouldn't be concern about recording meeting. Suggested that reading pages of meeting notes takes too long, and a recording of the actual meeting would be more accessible and would provide greater context around the discussion. Comment from CRG member that listening to the meeting is similar to listening to a podcast. Suggestion that recorded meetings and transcripts are easily produced. The belief that recorded meetings will enable accurate representation of meetings and prevent misinformation being spread. Comment from CRG member that with all the interjections in the meeting it is very difficult to follow the thread of the conversation via zoom. The belief from this online perspective was that if the meeting was recorded, participants would be ashamed of themselves and their interrupting. It would not be possible to follow a discussion in a recorded form. Response: that recording meetings was not preferred. If an audio option was required for ease of access, EnergyCo may investigate providing meeting notes in an audio format. Comment that recording might be important to get the messages out to the community and that there seems to be misinformation about the project. Response: Chair indicated that the purpose of CRG is not to dispel myths or garner support, but to have a core group of community representatives involved in learning the details related to NE REZ so that they can communicate these directly to others. Question from CRG member if the request to raise a motion was denied. Response: A motion will not be raised. Motions are not a part of the CRG model of operation. 		

	Action	Responsible	Status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment that denying the motion means “we don’t count” and doesn’t allow people to be responsible to their community. <p>Response: Reiteration of the role of the meeting notes and acknowledgement of previous concerns raised by the Valley Alliance about the need for more detail in the meeting notes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question from CRG member about role of CRG, if the CRG exists to meet the needs of EnergyCo, if members can expect to get anything from the meetings or are they only expected to listen and learn and take information back to community. <p>Response: That the CRG is a forum for EnergyCo to share project information, however it is also a forum for CRG members to share information about their communities and experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment from CRG member that members need evidence that EnergyCo are listening. Feeling that CRG are being told and not being listened to, would like proof that feedback is being considered and that contributions are effecting change. <p>Response – Reiteration of the role of the CRG and that this forum is a way to make comment. Reminder that they can make comment on the draft meeting notes to ensure that their concerns are adequately considered. Comment that communication between meetings is also just as powerful. Advised the role of the CRG would be addressed in further detail in a later agenda item.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question from CRG member that if CRG want to challenge the decision of the chair in relation to recording of the meetings, who do they approach. <p>Response - members are welcome to send a request to EnergyCo, but as a government department there are also further protocols regarding dissemination of recordings.</p> <p>Response – in relation to communication back to EnergyCo - Senior staff are interested to know feedback and concerns and feedback during CRG meetings is shared with decision makers and the broader project team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRG member asked if distributing letters to request the recording of meetings should be addressed to the Minister since the CRG is appointed by the Minister. <p>Response: Chair acknowledged that it is EnergyCo that is the final decision maker in this regard.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRG member request that the disagreement with the Chair’s decision about not recording the meeting be formally recorded in these meeting notes. Discussion about just making the recording available to Valley Alliance members and whether such a recording would constitute public dissemination. Comment from CRG member that too much time has been spent going around in circles with this discussion and request to continue moving through the agenda which is of interest to many of the members. 		
9.	Establish group email thread	Chair	Complete. Sent via email on 04/02/2025.

	Action	Responsible	Status
10.	Agenda items and guests presenting should be focused on topics relevant to EIS.	Chair	Noted.
11.	Investigate capacity for additional 2025 CRG meeting(s).	Chair	Complete. Agreed to hold at least one additional CRG meeting for 2025.
12.	Further information on role of the group and areas of expected input.	Melissa Maurer	To be discussed in CRG meeting on 30 April 2025.
13.	Provide information about the decision-making governance structure of EnergyCo as relates to the CRG.	Melissa Maurer	To be discussed in CRG meeting on 30 April 2025.

Membership Updates

- Heather Kember resigned from CRG
- Agreement by the CRG to readvertise to fill the community member position.

Action: EnergyCo will commence advertising and Chair will select a new replacement member.

Action: CRG members will be advised when application process is open so they can share information about the vacancy.

Around the room

- Item held over to end of meeting – see Item 13.

Network Operator Update

- Presented by Julian Watson, New England Deputy Project Director.
- EnergyCo has initiated procurement for a Network Operator to deliver the detailed design, construction and operation of the proposed transmission project. Industry engagement and briefing held in March.
- Priority to have a party on board that has a long-term view in place. EnergyCo wishes to have a network operator that has a long-term focus on the operation and management of the network above and beyond the construction phase.
- Formal Registration of Interest process complete, where parties were invited to register to be part of the next stage of the procurement process. Registered parties range from fully formed consortia through to single element providers. List of successful registrants available on the EnergyCo website.

- EnergyCo has a legal role as infrastructure planner for REZ areas and plays a region-wide coordination role.
- Network Operator procurement timeline was shared with the participants. Timeline allows the time required to provide appropriate proposals.
- Feedback will continue between EnergyCo and parties to ensure thorough understanding of the requirements and exchange of ideas during the procurement process. This is to give best value for money outcome and enable uptake of innovations.
- Tender submissions scheduled to be received in April 2026, selection of first ranked proponent target in Q4 2026, and targeting a contractual close in mid-2027.
- Question as to whether construction is anticipated to commence on contractual close date.

Response: There will likely be a gap between close of contract and major construction, but early works may occur. The setting up phase for a project this size is large, and housing, ancillary sites and other considerations are required to establish the project.

- CRG member commented that challenging access around Chaffey and Glenbawn dams has potential to impact route, and how will this be assessed and adjusted, and how impact on any new landholders will impact timelines should a route adjustment be required.

Response: EnergyCo confirmed it is assessing the route around the dams following feedback and consultation with key stakeholders. Changes will be made to avoid impacting aerial firefighting activities in these areas. Once a route is confirmed, EnergyCo will engage with landowners in the revised areas.

The revised alignment will continue to be refined up until lodgement of the EIS, and DPHI has a process that sets out how any future modification(s) to the EIS are to be managed.

- Question from CRG member about how route changes may affect EIS timelines.

Response: Formal review may be required, and any subsequent modification to the EIS would be considered, but it can also be within the area already assessed and will depend on extent and location of any change. Any changes within the 1km transmission study corridor is unlikely to cause delays around the EIS, whereas outside 1km may require EIS review or modifications.

- Expected completion date: Stage 1 2032 and Stage 2 2034.
- Comment that landholders were told they won't get easement payments until power is turned on, yet access to property and impact will occur from 2027.

Response: There are a number of payments available to host landowners, including construction lease payments, compensation to acquire an easement and the strategic benefit payment (SBP). SBP is paid annually over 20 years when the transmission line is operational.

Offer from Julian to get EnergyCo Property SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) to explain differences between licensing, lease and strategic benefits payment.

- Comment that information would be very helpful for Councils discussing matters with constituents.

Action: Send information from EnergyCo to members about Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme and acquisition compensation.

Action: Explanation of Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme, acquisition compensation, and other payments at future meeting.

Dinner

- Break for dinner 6.26pm – 6.37pm.
- Comment from member online that there is a need for people in the room to state their name and speak clearly.

Port to REZ

- Presented by Michael Burden, New England REZ Coordination Director - leads of group looking at cumulative impact studies and movement of oversize over mass (OSOM) components (e.g. wind turbine blades, wind tower sections and large electrical components).
- EnergyCo have a multi-REZ approach to investigating and planning for OSOM movements, known as the Port to REZ program. The Port to REZ program looks to provide a consistent approach across multiple REZ's, seeks to address pinch-points on the State road network and minimise impact to communities and road users.
- Contract recently awarded for the first stage of the Port to REZ program, being movements from the Port of Newcastle to the Central West Orana REZ. Additional information available on the EnergyCo website.
- Blades are longest piece of equipment and generally fabricated overseas and transported to Australia via sea.
- Objective to use the State road network where possible. EnergyCo working closely with Transport for NSW and Councils. Determining the access route through Muswellbrook is a priority.
- The Port to REZ program considers many factors (e.g. terrain, school zones, bridge heights and road geometry, movements of mining equipment and even movements of cattle. EnergyCo are working to optimise routes with consideration to technology and future growth.
- Route assessment, consultation with Councils, Transport for NSW, and landowners often takes much longer than the actual construction. Physical work likely to include intersection upgrades, adjustments to drainage, lighting and road furniture and general road improvements where required.
- Timelines:
 - Mid 2025 – confirm Muswellbrook OSOM route
 - Late 2025 – confirm Tamworth OSOM route

- Late 2026 – first OSOM deliveries to New England.

- Question regarding what involvement EnergyCo has with blade movements if it's the responsibility of the generators or developers.

Response: EnergyCo has the role of Infrastructure Planner as part of the whole of government approach to supporting the delivery of the electricity roadmap. The Port to REZ program seeks to provide a level of consistency and coordination for best community outcomes and reduced impact by looking to develop OSOM routes that accommodate multiple end-users (e.g., generator projects) so that a single solution is built rather than multiple solutions suiting only individual generator projects.

- EnergyCo is not responsible for getting every blade to every 'project gate', but as Infrastructure Planner, is seeking to maximise the optimisation of route design and overall coordination to minimise impact.
- Question from CRG member if rail had been considered for the transport of wind turbine blades.

Response: Wind turbine blades are transported by road instead of rail because their length, unique dimensions (both height and width) making rail transport impractical and inflexible. Most turbine blades exceed the length and turning capabilities of standard rail infrastructure that involve tight curves, tunnels, and bridges that cannot safely accommodate oversized components without major modifications.

- Question - if EnergyCo has conferred with mining companies regarding challenges transporting large items.

Response: The infrastructure required for the REZ network, such as transmission towers, poles, and wind turbine components, differ in size, shape, and handling requirements. Mining equipment is typically heavy and compact. EnergyCo are considering local freight conditions and have drawn on broader industry knowledge from sectors like mining.

- Project is in the early stages but keen to get the work done as early as possible, with a comprehensive process considering safety and road network impacts.
- Comment from CRG member that there have been multiple OSOM pathways through Merriwa, and a consistent framework for the New England Port to REZ project and route planning would reduce community impact.
- Comment from CRG member that ongoing coordination is vital, and discussion with Transport for NSW indicate that a Muswellbrook bypass will be the preferred option, despite being years away from completion.
- Comment from CRG member that lack of coordination and failure to consult with other stakeholders will cause chaos.

CRG Purpose

- Presented by Melissa Maurer, New England Place Manager.

- CRG provides a structured forum for discussion between community members, stakeholders and EnergyCo about New England REZ.
- Most importantly, EnergyCo want to use this forum to hear from CRG members. Encouraged members to share knowledge and identify issues, which will help support positive community outcomes. Use of information to guide landowner engagement.
- Appetite from leadership and EnergyCo executive to know what's happening on the ground.
- First meeting to set baseline, content for meetings moving forward to be guided by CRG.
- Offer input on project planning, engagement activities, emerging risks and opportunities. Act as a consultative group with input considered alongside other stakeholder feedback, as well as technical, economic and environmental considerations.
- CRG members have connections and networks into communities to ensure information gets to the right people. Request for members to help raise awareness about EnergyCo and what they are doing.
- The CRG is a key piece of a broader engagement and communication program.
- While the CRG is not a decision-making body, feedback and information provided is shared with the project team and helps guide project decisions. Keep providing information, it does help and can influence project outcomes.
- Comment that having hard discussions helps ensure the basics are right and can shift the dial.

First Nations Engagement

- Presented by Leanne Thompson, First Nations Advisor.
- Appointed to engage with community and build meaningful relationships.
- Consultation for cumulative impact assessments completed in early January, along with social infrastructure and skills training and employment.
- Cultural heritage impact is a priority, and Aboriginal communities want a voice, want to be engaged, and want to share in benefits like employment and the Community Employment Benefits Program.
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water are in the process of completing First Nations guidelines and establishing First Nations Working Group.
- Comment that feedback and priorities need to be listened to, and work together to ensure there is an Aboriginal voice.
- Question if there will be skills upgrading or just a focus on transferrable skills, and if funding will be provided.

Response: That pre-employment programs will be considered.

- Armidale have been very engaged, and have suggested an employment reference group, and support to get licenses and proof of identity. Armidale community want to run community style open meetings.
- Question asking if there are interested employment service providers and supporters.

Response: That communities will be engaged further in this.

- First Nations Guidelines for engagement with community within New England REZ, set up by Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and managed by EnergyCo.

Action: Send out information to CRG members about First Nations Guidelines when available

Action: Present about First Nations Guidelines at future meeting

- Comment that procurement guidelines are often a barrier to Aboriginal businesses tendering.
Response: That local supply chain, skills and training, and local participation is a focus.
- Next stage to connect large contractors with local stakeholders to develop relationships and create opportunity.

Engagement and Sharing Information

- Presented by Melissa Maurer, New England Place Manager.
- Community information sessions held for project milestones and regular community pop-up sessions scheduled along the project alignment. CRG meeting held in Walcha and pop-up scheduled for Walcha in response to CRG recommendation.
- Dedicated Place and Property Managers for one-on-one engagement with landowners. Affected landowners need a consistent person to liaise with and ask questions. Acquisition managers provide information and support about easement acquisition process.
- Online resources include interactive project map and fact sheet. Printed resources distributed to communities in corridor. Dedicated project phone line, email address and websites. Ongoing briefings with local communities.
- EnergyCo are looking at as many ways as possible to reach people and request feedback about what is working well. Request for CRG to make suggestions about the best ways to reach the communities and genuinely engage and share information in the right way. Request for suggestions and feedback.
- Comment from CRG member that food is a good way to engage people.
- Comment from CRG member that no one wants the projects, and they are being forced on communities, and compulsory acquisitions are to power the cities, with payment for a 20-year span on an 80-year project, isn't fair.

Response: That overall social good versus private impact will have tension, and it can be done poorly or well and EnergyCo is trying to do it well. There is an impact to individuals and communities, and invitation to CRG to support finding ways to improve.

- Request for anticipated timeframes and corresponding payments to be clearly communicated (Action captured earlier).
- Comment from CRG member commending transparent response and acknowledging that the people on the ground are subject to decisions that are made by the powers that be.
- Comment from CRG member that inadequate compensation is a bitter pill to swallow, compared to generous compensation for compulsory acquisition in the city. Property value is directly impacted by power lines, with value on property compensated by amounts which as consider to only breaks even and paid over a period, and 40 years of managing the property is ruined by compulsory acquisition.
- Comment from CRG member that we are living in a bygone era with respect to electricity, and renewable energy can be produced closer to where it is needed, and not be transported across the state, and the desire to maintain a monopoly on power is the driver rather than efficiency in the system.
- Request from CRG member to share visual documents from EnergyCo as a JPEG and PDF for ease of sharing on social media.

Other key project updates

- Presented by Julian Watson, New England Deputy Project Director.
- EnergyCo have commissioned a series of REZ-wide cumulative impact studies looking to understand the baseline characteristics of the REZ in its requirements for training and skills, local supply chain, workforce accommodation, traffic and transport, social infrastructure, water and wastewater, waste and circular economy, and telco uplift. Studies exploring impact of REZ on current availability, changes to supply and demand, and mitigation and preparation strategies. The objective is to prepare for change and to mitigate impacts.
- EnergyCo have developed a Community and Employment Benefits Program (CEBP) in the Central West Orana REZ, funded by contributions from generator projects connecting to that transmission network. EnergyCo are in the early stages of developing a similar program for the New England REZ and encourage the CRG to look at the Central West Orana REZ CEBP and will be seeking feedback from the CRG (and other groups) on their thoughts on how a CEBP might be tailored for the New England REZ. Suggestion from EnergyCo for Community and Employment Benefit Program to be discussed in September CRG.
- Question from CRG member asking if communities impacted by the REZ but not within the REZ are eligible for Community and Employment Benefit Program.
Response: This is currently being considered, and we will provide further information once available.
- Request for questions for CRG members to consider be sent prior to meeting, where possible, so meeting can flow smoothly and considered responses may be provided.

Action: Distribute links for Central-West Orana REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program.

Action: Community and Employment Benefit Program to be discussed at CRG meeting in September.

- REZ Inquiry has been established with 136 submissions received, 18 specifically referring to the New England REZ, and first hearing is scheduled for 13 May 2025.

Action: Link for NSW Legislative Council inquiry into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales to be distributed with slides.

- NSW Renewable Energy and Transmission Landholder Guide has been developed.

Action: Link to NSW Renewable Energy and Transmission Landholder Guide to be distributed.

Around the Room

- Adam thanked everyone for their time and suggested there can be more interaction between EnergyCo and Councils.
- Jeff offered to host the next meeting in Muswellbrook, commented that Council interacts with EnergyCo often and flagged concerns about the Community Benefit Scheme, and encouraged the CRG to get the most out of the group and represent their communities to get the best deal they can, and commented that lots of time at the meeting was spent on issues which don't provide value.
- Ninna is representing her community and feels it is important to share views, and suggested the meetings be longer to enable time to cover very important issues.
- Mark is representing 300 plus members who are heavily impacted and will continue to fight and advocate for them, and thanks CRG.
- Robert noted the term social license has disappeared from the vocabulary and noted big projects are going to be done by overseas consortia and promote use of 457s (employees brought into Australia on special visas).
- Linda disagreed with stated use of 457s and expressed that having these conversations early enables planning and support to provide opportunity. Expressed disappointment that important information was skipped through due to the long discussion regarding recording of meetings, such discussion detracts from her ability to represent her community and to hear from EnergyCo.
- Kate thanked everyone and expressed interest in the renewable transition and shared view that it needs to happen responsibly and wants to support the process.

General Business and Questions

- Discussion about possibility of daytime meetings, determined unsuitable for some members.
- Thursday and Friday not suitable days.
- Suggestion to have online video meetings outside scheduled meetings to discuss and give time to specific important topics.

- Comment that an open and frank discussion is vital and longer meetings may be required to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to ask questions.

Next meeting

To be Tuesday 1 July 2025 - 5pm to 7:30pm in Muswellbrook

	Action	Responsible	Status
1.	Check back with members re attention to detail and timeliness of EnergyCo communication and engagement.	EnergyCo	
2.	Questions for biodiversity specialists to be emailed through to Chair prior to meeting if possible.	CRG members	
3.	Actions will be numbered and assigned a timeframe for delivery.	Margaret Harvie	
4.	New actions or requests received outside of meetings added to register to ensure updates are shared and progress is tracked.	Margaret Harvie	
5.	EnergyCo will commence advertising and Chair will select a new replacement member.	Melissa Maurer	
6.	CRG members will be advised when application process is open so they can share information about the vacancy.	Chair	
7.	Send information from EnergyCo to members about Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme and acquisition compensation.	Julian Watson	
8.	Explanation of Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme, acquisition compensation, and other payments at future meeting.	Julian Watson	
9.	Send out information to CRG members about First Nations Guidelines when available.	Leanne Thompson via Chair	
10.	Present about First Nations Guidelines at future meeting.	Leanne Thompson	
11.	Distribute links for Central-West Orana REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program.	Julian Watson	

	Action	Responsible	Status
12.	Community and Employment Benefit Program to be discussed at CRG meeting in September.		
17.	Link for NSW Legislative Council inquiry into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales to be distributed with slides.	Chair	
18.	Link to NSW Renewable Energy and Transmission Landholder Guide to be distributed.	Melissa Maurer	

Other comments

Suggested topics for future meetings:

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- Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme, acquisition compensation, and other payments
 - Community Employment Benefits Program
 - REZ-Wide Studies (e.g., Housing and accommodation, Water & Wastewater)

Upcoming meetings

June/July

September

November

Meeting closed 7.55pm