

Assessment of the Aberbaldie-Niangala travelling stock reserve route

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

October 2024

Frequently asked questions

Q. How has the study corridor been developed for the REZ network infrastructure project?

Since 2022, EnergyCo has been following a comprehensive process to develop a study corridor for the New England REZ project guided by EnergyCo's planning pillars and principles and informed by ongoing environmental and technical assessments. In June 2023, we released a preliminary study corridor and began consultation with landowners, stakeholders and the community.

Since June 2023, we have met with more than 400 affected landowners to better understand property owner concerns and opportunities and carry out field studies across sections of the corridor. All this information was used to develop the revised study corridor announced in March 2024. The changes resulted in 80 fewer landholders in the study corridor, a total reduction in transmission easements of around 39km and a 6km increase in public land use.

The revised study corridor included changes in the Dungowan region, including some outgoing and some new landowners in the study area. Overall, 28 landowners were removed from the study area in this region.

For more information about the route selection process, view our fact sheet online at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. Why was an alternative route proposed?

In March 2024, some landholders and stakeholders around Dungowan, Woolomin, Duncans Creek, and the surrounding area raised concerns about the proposed location of the study corridor due to potential environmental, economic, and social impacts in this area.

Based on these concerns, community members and a local community group known as Valley Alliance provided feedback to EnergyCo suggesting an amended alignment be considered, which used the Aberbaldie-Niangala Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) to the east of EnergyCo's preferred study corridor (referred to as the TSR route).

Further details about the alternate route proposal is included in section 1.2 of the TSR assessment report on EnergyCo's website.

Q. How did EnergyCo assess the alternate route?

We conducted a detailed assessment of the TSR route against EnergyCo's key planning pillars and principles, which have formed the basis of our route selection process. These included:

- **People and communities:** how close the route would be to towns, how many landholders (both private and public) would be impacted, and the number of dwellings in proximity to the route
- **Environment and land use:** impacts to biodiversity value areas, impacts to high-value agricultural land, Aboriginal cultural heritage, bushfire resilience, as well as the use of suitable public land
- **Efficiency and deliverability:** the length of the transmission line needed, the ability to co-locate with existing infrastructure, and how challenging construction would be, including cost and time.

Q. What were the findings of the assessment?

The assessment found that the alternate options provided a better outcome on some criteria, including lower average slopes, access to existing roads for construction, increased use of public land and bushfire resilience in the travelling stock route (TSR) section.

However, the assessment showed that the preferred study corridor provided a better outcome on impacts on private landholdings, proximity to dwellings, interactions with land with high environmental and biophysical strategic agricultural land values, and construction time and costs.

On balance, the assessment found that the preferred study corridor provides better outcomes than the TSR route against multiple criteria, most notably impacts on private landowners. Therefore, the TSR route will not be progressed further.

We have released the TSR assessment report to provide transparency on the work that led to this conclusion.

The detailed assessment findings are outlined in the TSR report and available on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. Has community feedback informed the assessment?

Yes, the alternate route option was assessed in response to feedback from local community members in Dungowan, Woolomin, Duncans Creek, and surrounding areas. Throughout the review, we have engaged with Valley Alliance to discuss route options and compare findings and data.

We have continued to hold regular pop-up stalls throughout the region to receive feedback and answer questions.

Q. How can the community find out more about the assessment?

The TSR assessment report is available to view on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Community information sessions were held in late August and early September following the release of the TSR assessment report including in Woolomin, Uralla and Armidale. Several pop-up stalls have also been held across the region and will continue throughout the year. These events are an opportunity for the community to speak to our team and ask questions about the project and the TSR assessment.

You can find all the details about our upcoming engagement events at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/working-community.

Q. Will EnergyCo assess other alternate routes?

We understand communities and landowners would like certainty on the transmission corridor. From our detailed assessments to date, including the alternate TSR route assessment, we have found that, on balance, the existing preferred study corridor is the best option when considered against our planning pillars.

Our next step is to continue investigating the preferred study corridor within the 1km-wide area to identify suitable locations for the final transmission easements. We prioritise working with individual landowners to determine the most suitable route within the preferred study corridor. Understanding individual land use is important for us to design the project in a way that avoids, mitigates, and manages potential impacts on property wherever possible.

Q. Has the transmission route been finalised?

The transmission route has yet to be determined, and we are still working within a broad study area to identify potential locations for transmission lines, energy hubs and related infrastructure.

We are directly engaging with landowners in the study corridor to understand individual land use, such as farming and business operations, and the locations of existing dwellings and sheds as the project is designed. Input from landowners is critical to helping us achieve better community and environmental outcomes when planning the transmission route.

EnergyCo expects to lodge an environmental impact statement (EIS) for assessment and public exhibition in late 2025. The EIS will include a refined transmission corridor of about 250m wide. Until this time, changes and refinements will continue to occur in response to ongoing consultation and assessment.

Q. What are the next steps for the project?

In July 2024, EnergyCo lodged a scoping report for the REZ network infrastructure project with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI). This marked the first major step in the planning process for the project.

We are now continuing to carry out field investigations and detailed environmental assessments to inform the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project which is expected to be lodged for public exhibition in late 2025. During the public exhibition of the EIS interested stakeholders and community members will have the opportunity to consider the project on its merits and make a submission to DPHI.

Q. Will EnergyCo continue to engage with landowners and the community to develop the project?

Yes, EnergyCo will continue to work closely with individual landowners to inform the development of the transmission study corridor. In the coming months we will carry out targeted consultation with communities and stakeholder groups to inform the social impact assessment and Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment for the project's EIS.

We are also establishing two community reference groups for the project, which will provide an open forum for engagement between EnergyCo, community representatives and key stakeholder groups. You can find out more about the community reference groups and register your interest in being involved on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. What support is available for landowners?

We are committed to carrying out meaningful and respectful engagement with affected landowners as we develop the project. We have provided each landowner with a Place Manager and Property Manager who are dedicated points of contact to provide support and answer any questions about individual property matters and the project.

We understand that potential impacts from the REZ network infrastructure project can be emotionally challenging and stressful. The NSW Government has independent support available for landowners and communities directly affected by property acquisition, which you can find more information about at energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/support-landowners.

Q. When will the REZ network infrastructure project be operational?

Pending indicative planning approval in 2026, the REZ network infrastructure project is expected to begin construction in 2027. The first two stages of the project are scheduled for completion by 2033 to ensure energy security across NSW as our coal-fired power stations retire.

Q. How can the community find out more about the project?

We have a range of resources to help the community understand more about the New England REZ and network infrastructure project. This includes:

- **Engagement activities:** Our team hold regular pop-up events in the region to speak to the community and answer any questions about the project. Visit our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne for all the details about our upcoming engagement activities.
- **Fact sheets:** We have published a range of resources about the New England REZ and network infrastructure project, including fact sheets on key topics such as bush fire management, living and working around transmission lines and delivering benefits to communities. You can view our fact sheets at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/project-documents.
- **Interactive map:** Our interactive map shows key features of the New England REZ, including the transmission study corridor, proposed energy hub locations, existing high voltage network and land boundaries. The map is available to view online at caportal.com.au/energyco/rez.
- **Newsletter:** We distribute regular newsletters with the latest updates about the New England REZ. You can sign up for our newsletter on our website or by contacting our community engagement team via the details below.
- **Contact us:** We welcome community feedback and questions on an ongoing basis as we develop the REZ and network infrastructure project. Please contact our community engagement team by emailing nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au or by calling 1800 061 114 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday) if you have questions at any time.

Questions from the Woolomin community information session on 3 September 2024

Q. Will the project impact access to the Woolomin Evacuation Centre? How will the community be evacuated in the case of a flood?

No, the presence of transmission lines will not impact the operation of the Woolomin evacuation centre. Transmission lines will not impact road access to the evacuation centre, and aerial evacuation activities in the area will not be impacted as pilots are aware of the location of power lines.

We take emergency management seriously and will prepare a detailed hazard and risk assessment for the project's EIS. The assessment will consider risks to public safety from the construction and operation of the project, including bushfires and flooding, and identify mitigation and management measures to manage any risks. EnergyCo will work closely with NSW State Emergency Services (SES) to ensure emergency access is maintained at all times in the vicinity of the project.

Q. How will water security be managed in the area?

Water security will be addressed in detail as part of the project's EIS. The EIS will include assessments of the project's potential impacts on water resources in consultation with the relevant water authorities, including estimated water demand during construction and the sources and security of water supply. The assessments will also consider potential impacts on water quality, flooding, and groundwater, as well as outline the proposed measures to minimise these impacts. We will engage with landowners to inform various water assessments for the EIS.

EnergyCo is also conducting studies to identify opportunities to address water and wastewater security across local government areas along the transmission route, including in the Tamworth Regional Council area. This includes work to understand the current capacity of water and wastewater services and likely peak demands during the development of the REZ, as well as to identify potential management and security strategies to ensure an adequate water supply and wastewater treatment. The studies' findings will help inform the development of the EIS. EnergyCo will continue consultation and engagement with councils and authorities on this matter as part of the studies.

Q. What happens to strategic benefit payments after 20 years?

The NSW Government has established the strategic benefit payment scheme as additional compensation to recognise the critical role private landowners hosting new transmission projects play in the energy transition. The scheme is unique to new transmission projects and is above the compensation offered for other infrastructure projects in NSW.

Under the scheme, eligible landowners will receive \$200,000 per kilometre of transmission hosted, paid out annually over 20 years (indexed to CPI). These payments are in addition to compensation under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* (Just Terms Act), which is paid upfront and aims to support and recognise private landowners for hosting new transmission infrastructure.

The 20-year period is consistent with the access rights that will be granted to renewable energy generation and storage projects to connect to the new transmission infrastructure in renewable energy zones under the *NSW Roadmap and Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*. It is structured to ensure that private landowners hosting new transmission infrastructure will receive a share of the infrastructure's benefits and that if the ownership of land changes over time, then the new landowner will continue to receive any future scheme payments.

Payments will end after 20 years, as outlined in the policy paper available to view at energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/strategic-benefit-payments-scheme.

Q. Is there an ombudsman?

In October 2024, the NSW Government announced the role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) would be expanded to include new major renewable energy infrastructure projects. The new services will be rolled out in December 2024 and will include an investigation and resolution process for residents dissatisfied with how the relevant transmission and renewable energy entities handle their complaints. Further details can be found online at www.ewon.com.au or by calling EWON on 1800 246 545.

Q. Did EnergyCo assess the Glenrock route put forward by Valley Alliance in the TSR route assessment?

Yes, EnergyCo considered the Glenrock route part of the TSR route assessment. The assessment considered four alternative options to connect back to the project to ensure that the TSR route was assessed holistically and its feasibility fully considered:

- TSR route option 1A – via Duncans Creek
- TSR route option 1B – via Garoo-Hanging Rock
- TSR route option 1C – via mid-western route
- TSR route option 1D – via Glenrock (i.e. the option suggested by Valley Alliance).

TSR route options 1C and 1D use elements of the mid-western route that was previously considered in detail by EnergyCo as part of the options evaluation assessment. This option runs from Glenbawn Dam – Moonan Flat – Ellerston – Glenrock and up to the top of the plateau near the start of the TSR. The mid-western route was previously not recommended when assessed against the western corridor.

Given the previous constraints associated with the mid-western route, the TSR assessment focused on the TSR route and a comparative assessment of the preferred study corridor and the TSR options 1A and 1B.

For more information on the options considered in the assessment please see the [TSR assessment report](#) on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne. To read the options evaluation assessment, which considers the mid-western route in detail, please see the scoping report on our website.

Q. Did EnergyCo consider dwellings in the TSR route assessment?

Yes, EnergyCo carried out a dwellings analysis for the TSR route assessment, which compared the number of dwellings impacted in the Base Case (preferred study corridor) with TSR route options 1A and 1B. The analysis also details the number of dwellings between 250m and 2km of the study area along the TSR section.

The dwellings evaluation indicates that overall, the Base Case has the least number of dwellings within 250m, 500m, and 1km from the edge of the assessment corridor compared to options 1A and 1B. The Base Case also has less dwellings within 2km of the edge of the assessment corridor compared to both options.

The full detail of the dwelling analysis is included in section 5.2 of the TSR assessment report.

Q. Did EnergyCo drive the TSR route?

Yes, a number of EnergyCo staff, including the New England REZ Project Director, Environment and Planning Lead, and Property Lead, drove the travelling stock reserve (TSR) route on separate occasions to inform the assessment.

Q. Why does the transmission route split from co-located lines to single lines in the Bendemeer area? Why can't the lines both go to a single hub?

This is the optimal route design for the project when considering technical requirements and EnergyCo's key planning pillars.

The New England REZ network infrastructure project will be delivered in stages. This allows the transmission network to be progressively energised and reflects the staged delivery of solar, wind, and storage projects in the REZ.

Stage 1 is planned to be built by 2031 and includes:

- four energy hubs – central, north, east and central south
- a single 500kV double circuit transmission line between the central hub and Bayswater substation near Muswellbrook
- transmission line connections between the central hub and the north, east and central south hubs (500kV and 330kV).

In stage 1, all energy will flow through the central hub before being transferred from the REZ to the Bayswater substation and on to energy consumers. When considering environmental, land use, technical, constructability, and other constraints, we need to connect the central hub to the existing network at Bayswater via a direct route. The route was selected by weighing up these criteria on balance. This line co-locates for part of its length with Transgrid's existing network and proposed generator projects, which is one of EnergyCo's key planning pillars.

Stage 2 is planned to be built by 2033 and includes an additional 500kV line between the central south hub and Bayswater substation. Once stage 2 is energised, the central south hub will play an important role in transferring bulk power south to Bayswater along with the central hub. This is why the eastern 500kV also follows a direct route between the central south hub and Bayswater,

resulting in the 'line split'. We consider this as two lines coming together in the sense of the southward flow of energy from the REZ to Bayswater.

Building separate 500kV transmission line easements between the central and central south hubs and Limbri also takes account of the local conditions. The separate lines can each be managed independently, improving the overall resilience of the transmission network. This helps ensure a reliable flow of power from the REZ to the Bayswater substation in the case that either line needs to be switched off, including in the event of a bushfire.

The central and central south hubs are also connected to provide resilience between the hubs (and their lines to Bayswater) in the event of a line or hub issue. This allows energy flows to be managed between the two lines if required.

The staged delivery approach is shown on page 64 of the project's scoping report (available to view on the [NSW Major Projects Planning Portal](#)).

Q. How does splitting the line help with bushfire risk?

It improves the reliability of the transmission infrastructure in the event of a bushfire.

The topography of the land where the transmission line makes its way down from the Northern Tablelands plateau is characterised by steep and vegetated terrain. Due to this terrain, this area has the highest relative bushfire risk to the operation of the transmission lines along the New England REZ transmission route.

While high voltage transmission lines have a very low risk of causing a bushfire (explained in our [bushfire fact sheet](#)), the electricity network may be affected by bushfires in the region with transmission lines generally having to be shut down as a bushfire passes. Therefore, extra consideration was given to managing network resilience due to bushfire risk in this area.

Having a single transmission route in this area would increase the risk of interrupting the power supply in a bushfire event, as this would require both lines to be switched off simultaneously. Building two separate transmission routes in this area reduces this risk as it is much less likely to occur with two separate routes. This improves the reliability of energy supply from the New England REZ network infrastructure project.

Other parts of the transmission route have also been identified as having a high bushfire risk to the operation of the transmission lines. However, the bushfire risk in these areas is more variable, and therefore, the risk to network infrastructure is lower. This typically applies to areas south of Limbri where the two transmission lines are located next to each other.

Q. How will EnergyCo mitigate impacts on the koala habitat in the area?

Minimising environmental impacts is a key planning pillar in developing the New England REZ network infrastructure project. The project is designed to avoid or minimise impacts on national parks, nature reserves, important wetlands and rainforests, and habitats of threatened species such as koalas.

EnergyCo is undertaking a detailed biodiversity assessment as part of the project's environmental impact statement. This will include targeted koala surveys.

We will implement several measures to minimise impacts during construction. Ecologists will be on site prior to and during clearing to identify any koalas and identify suitable nearby locations for release unharmed. Ecologists also conduct daily checks throughout construction to ensure no koalas have returned to the worksite. Areas of koala habitat to be retained will also be identified on-site, and no machinery, vehicles, or equipment will be allowed in these areas.

Once the project is complete, koalas can move freely through the vegetation retained in the easement.

Like any other large infrastructure project, not all biodiversity impacts can be avoided. These residual impacts will need to be offset in accordance with well-established offsetting frameworks, which are not unique to EnergyCo or transmission projects.

More information about biodiversity matters, including assessments and mitigation measures, can be found in the scoping report via our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. Will grazing cattle near transmission lines impact EU accreditation for beef exports?

The European Union Cattle Accreditation Scheme (EUCAS) is a national animal production scheme that helps Australian beef producers meet EU market requirements around livestock traceability and the use of hormonal growth promotants (HGP).

The scheme does not include any requirements around livestock and power lines. Therefore, the presence of transmission lines would not impact producers' ability to achieve EUCAS accreditation.

Q. How will energy infrastructure be decommissioned at the end of its lifespan?

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure has developed a draft energy policy framework that provides a guide for how the impacts of renewable energy projects and transmission infrastructure will be assessed and managed.

The Draft Wind Energy Guideline states that the project applicant should be responsible for decommissioning and rehabilitating infrastructure. Individual developers are responsible for determining how their projects will be decommissioned and rehabilitated, which should be reflected in a host agreement with the landowner.

For more information about decommissioning and rehabilitation of renewable energy projects, see the draft energy policy framework via the NSW Planning Portal and the [Draft Private Agreement Guideline \(2023\)](#) on the NSW Planning Portal at pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au.

EnergyCo will assess and outline a plan for decommissioning and rehabilitating the New England REZ network infrastructure as part of the project's EIS.

Q. Will hosting transmission infrastructure affect insurance premiums for private landowners? Who is responsible if damage occurs to project infrastructure?

The National Energy Market is serviced by an extensive transmission network of thousands of kilometres across Eastern Australia. We are unaware of any evidence that the presence of transmission lines increases the risk of landowners obtaining insurance or insurance cover being

refused. If you have any information in relation to this, please contact our team on 1800 061 114 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday) or by emailing nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au.

To the extent that an individual property owner can demonstrate an increase in insurance premium as a direct consequence of the construction and operation of transmission infrastructure on their land, this can be considered as part of easement compensation assessments in accordance with the Just Terms Act. EnergyCo will work with landowners to ensure any such matter is resolved fairly.

The network operator would be liable for any directly attributable damage caused to land and property during the construction and operation of the transmission line. The network operator will hold insurance policies with reputable insurers to cover any risks to workers, contractors, and landowners' property as a result of constructing and operating the transmission network.

Personal or business insurance requirements would be at the discretion of the landowner, and rates would be subject to a range of factors for each individual property. In the event landowners are experiencing issues with increased insurance due to the project, EnergyCo will work with them to address the issue.

Q. Is it feasible to combine overhead and underground transmission infrastructure for the transmission route?

When developing transmission projects, EnergyCo considers the most appropriate technology solutions for each project on a case-by-case basis against a range of factors. While it may be technically feasible to combine overhead and underground solutions in some circumstances, it may be an unreasonable solution when considering the cost to consumers and other factors.

EnergyCo's view is that in general, at extra high voltages, overhead transmission best balances the considerations of cost to consumers, project delivery schedule, construction risk, environmental impact, reliability and transfer capacity.

EnergyCo's submission to the Select Committee on the Feasibility of Undergrounding the Transmission Infrastructure for Renewable Energy Projects (2023) addresses this in detail. The submission is available to view online at parliament.nsw.gov.au.

Q. How does EnergyCo share information with community members who do not have access to online resources?

We understand that different communication methods suit different people, which is why we use multiple channels to engage with communities. We have heard that some community members don't have access to online resources, so we will continue to make printed copies of our materials available at local venues such as councils, post offices, community notice boards and other locations.

If you have ideas about where we can make materials available in your local area, please get in touch. We would like to hear your feedback.

To request a printed version of our materials, please call us toll-free at 1800 061 114, and we will arrange for a copy to be mailed to your address.

We also have a team of place managers in the region who engage with landowners and hold regular pop-up events at local towns and events to chat with the community about the project and answer any questions.

Q. What is the approval process for the New England REZ network infrastructure project?

The New England REZ network infrastructure project was declared a Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI) project by the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces in June 2024 as it is considered 'essential for the State for economic, environmental or social reasons'. Under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act)*, CSSI applications must be approved by the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces following a comprehensive assessment process. This includes extensive community consultation and preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Once EnergyCo has submitted the EIS and a submission report to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), the DPHI Secretary will prepare an assessment report for the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces to consider for project approval. The Minister's approval would be subject to a set of conditions EnergyCo must comply with when delivering the project.

Additional approval is also required from the Australian Minister for the Environment and Water as the project has been determined a 'controlled action' under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Commonwealth)*. This is in addition to the NSW approval process.

If the project is approved, it will be built and operated in accordance with the plans and mitigation measures described in the EIS, submissions report and conditions of approval.

For more information, our [planning approval fact sheet](https://energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/project-documents) is available to read at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/project-documents.

Q. Has EnergyCo contacted landowners that will be visually affected by the transmission lines?

Visual impacts for landowners have yet to be confirmed, as we are still determining where the transmission lines will be located within the 1 km-wide study corridor.

We expect to lodge an EIS in late 2025, including a detailed landscape and visual impact assessment. The assessment will consider public and private viewpoints, the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receivers, and assess the visual impact of any changes resulting from the project.

As part of the assessment, we will consult with landowners to understand their feedback on potential visual amenity impacts. We have started this engagement with landowners and will continue through 2024 and 2025 as we develop the EIS.

Q. Where will ancillary sites be located, such as concrete batching plants? Where will construction access roads be located?

EnergyCo is currently investigating where ancillary sites and access roads will be located to support the construction of the REZ network. As part of this work, we are consulting with landowners and

carrying out field investigations to determine suitable locations for ancillary infrastructure and access roads. The proposed locations will be identified and assessed in the EIS.

Landowners will be compensated for hosting access roads and ancillary infrastructure. If you are interested in learning more, please contact our team.

For more information

If you have any questions, contact our community engagement team for the New England REZ on **1800 061 114** (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday) or by emailing nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au.

You can find information about the project on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne, including our latest project updates, maps, fact sheets and more.