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# Hunter Central Coast Regional Reference Group

Terms of Reference

March 2025



# Acknowledgement of Country

The Energy Corporation of New South Wales acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. Since the Dreaming the Awabakal, Darkinjung, Wanaruah and Worimi peoples have cultivated and sustained a deep connection with their land, waters and skies which are central to their spiritual identity, despite the devastating impacts of colonisation and forced removal. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past and present through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically. Through a shared voice and collective action, we can forge a more resilient region evident in economic, social and environmental aspects, while upholding our cultural values.

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Published by the Energy Corporation of New South Wales

[energyco.nsw.gov.au](http://energyco.nsw.gov.au)

Hunter Central Coast Regional Reference Group

First published: January 2025

Department reference number: <Add CM9 Record number>

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TMP-MC-R-DC-V1.2

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Overview

This document outlines the terms of reference for the Regional Reference Group for the Hunter Central Coast. As suggested by the name, the group is intended to represent stakeholders from across the region and promote a two-way engagement on all of the projects the Energy Corporation of NSW is delivering across the Hunter Central Coast region.

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## 1.2 Geographic Region and Scope

The Hunter Central Coast Region covers five<sup>1</sup> distinct EnergyCo projects, being:

- The Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (HCC REZ)
- The Hunter Transmission Infrastructure Project (HTP)
- The Newcastle Logistics Precinct
- The Waratah Super Battery
- The Port to REZ road network upgrades

These projects all cover the same regional geography of the Hunter Central Coast and is defined within the boundaries of the following local government areas (as indicated in Figure 1):

Central Coast	Upper Hunter
Lake Macquarie	Maitland
Newcastle	Port Stephens
Cessnock	Mid-Coast
Singleton	Dungog
Muswellbrook	

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<sup>1</sup> New or emerging projects may be introduced to the Regional Reference Group that have interface with the Hunter Central Coast region, including the New England Renewable Energy Zone Network Infrastructure Project.

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Figure 1 Hunter Central Coast EnergyCo Portfolio

Together these projects result in a considerable amount of potential investment and employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly

With this quantum of projects and associated impacts, there is a potential for considerable risk to EnergyCo's social licence should each project be managed independently, engaged independently and implemented in isolation. A coordinated engagement approach with the Hunter Central Coast community is therefore required to ensure EnergyCo can foster community support for the renewable energy transition and its projects.

The Hunter Central Coast is a regional hub for adjoining areas, both socially and economically, housing major health, retail, education and transport (with the regional Airport and one of three Ports in the state). It will play a significant role for the surrounding Renewable Energy Zones, with the Port to REZ access for New England and Central West Orana feeding through the Hunter from the Port of Newcastle.

The Hunter Central Coast Regional Reference Group will play an important role in supporting EnergyCo to foster local community support for new generation, storage, network and related infrastructure through open and honest collaboration with diverse stakeholder groups. In addition, the Regional Reference Group will assist EnergyCo in identifying opportunities and removing barriers to maximising benefits to the Hunter-Central Coast community that can result from the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap and energy transition across NSW.

## 2 Overview

The EnergyCo Hunter Central Coast Regional Reference Group (HCCRRG) will perform an advisory and consultative role. EnergyCo as the NSW Infrastructure Planner, the Network Operator of the region and the broader community across all of the EnergyCo portfolio of projects within the Hunter and Central Coast Region.

The purpose of the HCCRRG is to:

- Facilitate genuine engagement between EnergyCo and the broader Hunter community on all Hunter Central Coast EnergyCo projects;
- Provide independent, high-level input on all Hunter Central Coast EnergyCo projects;
- Allow EnergyCo to seek feedback from the community on project-related matters; and
- Give the community a forum to ask for information or give feedback.

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### 2.1 Objectives and responsibilities

The HCCRRG is established to perform an advisory and consultative role. The HCCRRG will provide a forum for strategic discussions between EnergyCo and the broader Hunter community about all Hunter Central Coast projects, including;

- The design of the projects;
- Community views on the project;
- Actions to avoid and minimise impacts on people and the environment;
- Ideas and initiatives to maximise the benefits for the Hunter Central Coast community; and
- Actions to reduce the cumulative impacts of the Hunter Central Coast EnergyCo projects

In addition, regular meetings between the Independent Chair of the HCCRRG and EnergyCo representatives will be maintained to ensure a genuine, transparent, and consistent flow of information. This engagement will support informed decision-making, build trust, and strengthen collaboration between the HCCRRG and EnergyCo.

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### 2.2 Roles

The HCCRRG will comprise of the following formal roles:

- Chair – as outlined in the following section

- Secretary – The EnergyCo Regional Coordination team will convene the meetings on behalf of EnergyCo

The HCCRGG will be chaired by an independent chairperson. The Chair is expected to:

- Provide leadership
- Be independent and impartial
- Act as the key contact between the HCCRGG and EnergyCo
- Facilitate constructive discussion between members
- Give all members an opportunity to share their views
- Help resolve any differences of opinion between members fairly and transparently.

If the Chair is absent or unavailable to attend a meeting, an alternative Chair will be nominated by the HCCRGG members.

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## 2.3 Membership

The HCCRGG will comprise of:

- An independent chair
- Council representatives from each of the relevant councils (Muswellbrook, Singleton, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie)
- A regional representative from First Nations Community
- A regional business and industry representative
- A regional environment representative
- Local community representatives with relevant project/subject matter expertise

EnergyCo will appoint the representatives for the HCCRGG in consultation with key stakeholders, including local Councils.

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## 2.4 Remuneration

The independent chairperson will be paid a daily sitting fee by EnergyCo for arranging and chairing meetings or attendance at other relevant events or engagements requested by EnergyCo as well as other associated costs.

Other members will not be paid for their services but will be able to recover any reasonable costs associated with attending meetings (petrol, meals, etc) from EnergyCo.



## 3 Meeting governance

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### 3.1 Quorum

A representative of EnergyCo and six (6) regional reference group members must be present to establish a quorum unless otherwise agreed by other committee members.

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### 3.2 Meeting frequency

The HCCRRG will be held at least four times a year, but more frequently if necessary. The Chair will meet with EnergyCo on a quarterly basis to provide feedback.

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### 3.3 Venue

Committee meetings will be held face-to-face in the Hunter Central Coast region where practical. Face-to-face meetings may be held in council offices and/or at a location nominated by core members on a rotating basis. Videoconferencing facilities will be provided to allow members to attend meetings remotely.

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### 3.4 Guest attendees

Subject to approval from the Chair/members, guests may be invited to join a committee meeting either as observers or to provide advice or project updates. This may include representatives from EnergyCo, Network Operators, other relevant State Agencies and technical experts or consultants.

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### 3.5 Extraordinary meetings

If there are important and urgent matters requiring consideration, any member may ask the Chair to convene an extraordinary meeting. The co-chairs will decide whether the extraordinary meeting is warranted, or whether the matters can be addressed in other ways.

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## 3.6 Notice period

Members of the committee will be given at least three weeks' notice before a regular meeting and one week's notice before an extraordinary meeting.

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## 3.7 Consideration of Technical Expertise

The HCCRRG may be provided with technical documentation or briefings from Technical Expertise. This information will be provided to the HCCRRG to inform considered and educated decision making. Where possible, technical documents will be provided with sufficient time for review with and will be covered within either regular or extraordinary meetings.

## 4 Issue resolution

All members recognise and accept the need to act in good faith and use their best endeavours to achieve the HCCRRG objectives.

If circumstances arise where agreement cannot be reached despite the best efforts of members, the matter in question is to be referred to the chair and its resolution deferred until a process to reach agreement is confirmed by reference group members.

## 5 Conflicts of Interest

If a member of the HCCRRG has a direct or indirect pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest in a matter being considered or about to be considered at a meeting, and this interest appears to raise a conflict with the proper performance of the member's duties in relation to the consideration of the matter, the member must, as soon as possible, disclose the nature of the interest at the meeting.

Details of any disclosure will be recorded in the meeting minutes. The committee chair will determine if the member must leave the meeting for the duration of that agenda item. If the declared interest results in ongoing conflict, or may appear to result in ongoing conflict, the committee may determine that the advice of a probity advisor is required and arrange for their engagement.

## 6 Confidentiality

All information provided to the HCCRRG on a confidential basis must not be discussed with the broader community.

This does not apply to information which is in the public domain (other than through a breach of confidentiality), nor does it apply to disclosure of confidential information if required by law.

If HCCRRG need to discuss issues and share project information to progress the objectives of the HCCRRG, appropriate confidentiality / commercial in confidence requirements must be in place and administered.



## 7 Media and public comment

The HCCRRG may decide to release statements or other information to the media or adopt other approaches to publicise information. However, only the Chair may speak publicly to the media on behalf of the HCCRRG. Individual members may make comments to the media or in public forums on behalf of themselves or their stakeholder groups, but not on behalf of the HCCRRG.

## 8 Terms of reference review

EnergyCo may propose changes to these terms of reference to ensure continued effectiveness. The Terms of Reference (ToR) have been designed to be a living document, subject to a 12-month review and refinement process. The review will include a thorough evaluation of the ToR's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. The findings of the review will be used to inform any necessary revisions or updates to the ToR, ensuring it remains current, relevant, and aligned with the HCCRRG priorities.

Over time, EnergyCo may:

- Vary the Terms of Reference of the HCCRRG
- Expand the membership of the HCCRRG
- Replace the members of the HCCRRG
- Provide further guidance on the operation of the HCCRRG

Any changes would be made in consultation with the Chair and HCCRRG members.

## 9 Version control

Revision	Author	Description	Date
0.1	Regional Coordination team	Draft for internal review	10 February 2025
0.2	Reviewed by Director Regional Coordination team	Circulation of a draft version	05 March 2025

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