EnergyCo

Revised study corridor community feedback report

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

June 2022

www.energyco.nsw.gov.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The Energy Corporation of NSW acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging 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.

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Executive summary

The NSW Government has appointed the Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) to lead the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in NSW. REZs are modern-day power stations, connecting new clean energy generation and storage to electricity consumers across NSW.

EnergyCo is delivering the State's first REZ in the Central-West Orana region. The Central-West Orana REZ was formally declared by the NSW Minister for Energy and Environment in November 2021.

Revised study corridor consultation

In February 2022, EnergyCo announced a revised study corridor for new transmission network infrastructure in the Central-West Orana REZ. This builds upon early development work and community consultation carried out by Transgrid on a preliminary study corridor for the transmission route in 2020 and 2021.

The revised corridor was developed by EnergyCo to help reduce impacts on sensitive land uses in the region and enable us to deliver greater capacity to meet future energy needs.

EnergyCo invited the community and stakeholders to provide feedback on the revised study corridor for the Central-West Orana REZ in February and March 2022. This feedback was sought to inform the proposed route for new transmission network infrastructure within the revised study corridor.

In total, EnergyCo received 35 submissions from local landowners, community members and organisations during the consultation period. The feedback received covered a wide range of issues relating to the proposed transmission network infrastructure, renewable energy developments and the wider REZ. In addition to receiving written submissions, we also collected additional informal feedback through direct discussion with landowners and community members at six drop-in information sessions held in early March 2022.

Key topics raised by the community included:

- Feedback on the proposed locations for transmission infrastructure
- Cumulative impacts to communities within the REZ
- Impacts to the environment and local amenity
- Property impacts including acquisition and land values
- Feedback and suggestions about community engagement activities.

Further details about the issues raised and EnergyCo's responses are outlined in this report.

Next steps

All feedback received during the consultation period is being considered by EnergyCo as we further refine the transmission route. The feedback has also informed the development of the project's Scoping Report which is the first step in the project's environmental planning process.

Following the release of the Scoping Report in the third quarter of 2022, the next key milestone will be the public exhibition of the Environmental Impact Statement in late 2023.

We thank everyone who took time to review the revised study corridor and provide feedback. We will continue to work closely with local landowners and communities as the project progresses and we will keep people informed about future opportunities to provide feedback.

Introduction

Background

The NSW Government has appointed the Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) to lead the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in NSW. REZs are modern-day power stations, connecting new clean energy generation and storage to electricity consumers across NSW.

The State's five existing coal fired power stations will progressively close, starting with Liddell in 2022-23. These power stations currently provide around three quarters of NSW's electricity supply.

The NSW Government is taking action to lead investment in new renewable generation to ensure an orderly transition away from coal. With some of the best renewable energy resources in the world, NSW is in a unique position to benefit from emerging low-cost technologies like wind, solar, batteries and pumped hydro.

The REZs will be serviced by new high-capacity transmission infrastructure to deliver energy to the homes, businesses and industries that need it. This will achieve economies of scale for affordable, clean and reliable electricity in NSW.

About the Central-West Orana REZ

Overview

EnergyCo is developing the State's first REZ in the Central-West Orana region. The REZ is about 20,000 square kilometres in size and centred by Dubbo and Dunedoo, on the land of the Wiradjuri, Wailwan and Kamilaroi people.

The Central-West Orana region has a strong mix of energy resources and significant investor interest. It also benefits from lower transmission build costs due to its proximity to the existing high voltage network.

The REZ will play a pivotal role in underpinning NSW's transition to a cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy sector. The NSW Government has committed to delivering at least three gigawatts of initial power transfer capacity from the REZ.

EnergyCo is leading the development of new transmission network infrastructure within the Central-West Orana REZ. This infrastructure includes new high capacity transmission lines and energy hubs which will transfer power from renewable energy generation projects such as solar and wind farms to electricity consumers. EnergyCo is also working closely with the developers of renewable energy projects to plan their connections into the REZ transmission network.

What's happened to date

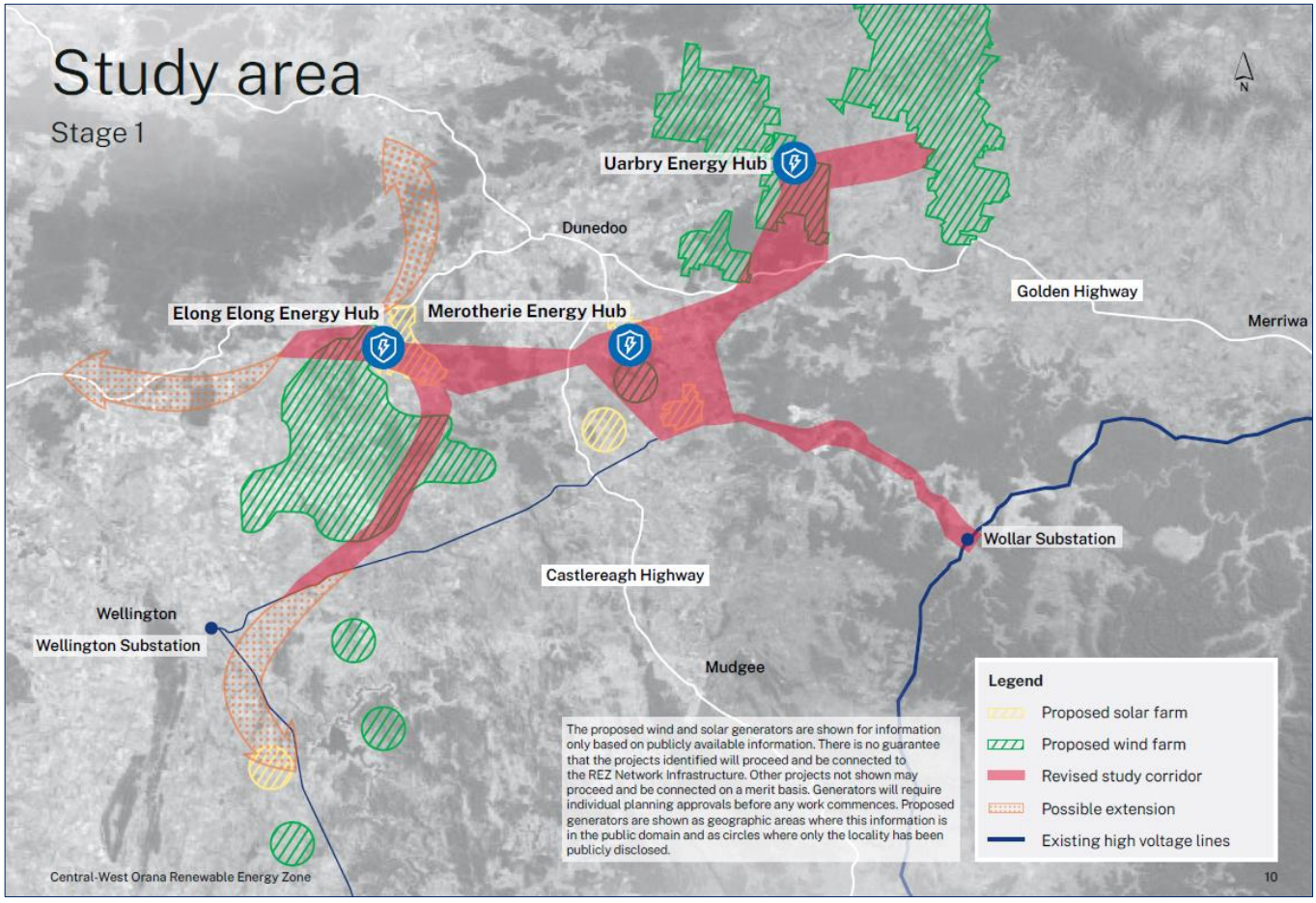
The NSW Government engaged Transgrid, as the State's jurisdictional transmission planner, to carry out early development work to guide the planning of new transmission infrastructure for the Central-West Orana REZ in 2020. Transgrid carried out community consultation on the preliminary study corridor for the transmission route up until late 2021.

In November 2021, the Central-West Orana REZ was formally declared by the Minister for Energy and Environment and EnergyCo was appointed as the Infrastructure Planner. At this time, EnergyCo assumed responsibility for engaging local communities and stakeholders to inform the development of new transmission network infrastructure within the REZ.

Revised study corridor

In February 2022, EnergyCo announced a revised study corridor for the REZ network infrastructure that will reduce impacts on sensitive land uses in the region and enable us to deliver greater capacity to meet future energy needs. In particular, while the western sections of the corridor remain largely the same as originally proposed by Transgrid, the eastern section of the previous study corridor has been redesigned to avoid high-quality agricultural land on the Merriwa Cassilis plateau, with the majority of the new corridor now located on land owned by mining companies, alongside existing transmission lines, or wind and solar development areas.

Revised study corridor for the Central-West Orana REZ transmission infrastructure



Purpose of this report

EnergyCo invited the community and stakeholders to provide feedback on the revised study corridor in February and March 2022. This report outlines the community feedback received during this consultation and EnergyCo's responses. The consultation outcomes described in this report will be used to further refine the transmission route and inform the Scoping Report for the REZ network infrastructure.

Engagement approach

Objectives

EnergyCo's objectives for the consultation period were to:

- Seek feedback from local communities and stakeholders on the revised study corridor for the Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure
- Engage with potentially affected landowners to understand their sentiment on hosting transmission infrastructure
- Build on the consultation carried out by Transgrid on the preliminary study corridor prior to EnergyCo being appointed as Infrastructure Planner
- Establish EnergyCo as the point of contact for the REZ network infrastructure.

How engagement was carried out

We carried out a range of activities to inform communities and stakeholders about the revised study corridor consultation and seek feedback. Our key activities are outlined below.

Activity	Description
Project Overview	We published a Project Overview to inform people about the project and explain the next steps. The document was made available online and via hard copies at engagement events.
Letter to landowners	We sent letters to about 350 landowners within the revised study corridor to inform them about the consultation period and invite feedback.
Website	We published updated information on the project web page.
Media release	A media release was distributed on 25 February 2022 announcing the revised study corridor.
Advertisements	Print advertisements were published on 25 February and 4 March 2022 in the Daily Liberal and the Mudgee Guardian and Gulgong Advertiser.
Email distribution	We distributed information directly to key stakeholders via email.
Information sessions	We held six drop-in information sessions for community members to meet the project team and ask questions. These were attended by about 130 individuals. The sessions were held in local venues at Wellington, Gulgong and Dunedoo.
Project contact details	We publicised dedicated project contact details so people could speak directly with the team: Phone: 0482 061 006 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday) Email: info@cworez.net.au
Stakeholder briefings	We held meetings with a range of key stakeholders to brief them on the revised study corridor. This included elected representatives, local Councils, organisations and interest groups.

Council engagement

As part of the consultation period, EnergyCo met with Mid-Western Regional Council, Dubbo Regional Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council to discuss the revised study corridor for the REZ network infrastructure.

The Councils raised a number of topics in relation to project impacts within their local government areas, including:

- Ideas for community benefit funding initiatives
- Potential impacts to local business and tourism
- Upgrades and maintenance of local roads
- Waste management
- Construction workforce accommodation and services.

We are considering the feedback and suggestions received from Councils as we further develop plans for the REZ. We will continue to work closely with them to manage any impacts to Council assets, as well as engaging with them to develop community benefit sharing opportunities and strategies to mitigate cumulative impacts to local communities and businesses.

Feedback

Summary

We received 35 submissions from landowners, community members and organisations during the revised study corridor consultation period. This feedback was received in writing via email and through feedback forms which were made available at the drop-in information sessions.

The feedback received covered a wide range of issues relating to the proposed transmission network infrastructure, renewable energy developments and the wider REZ. Key topics raised included:

- Feedback on the proposed locations for transmission infrastructure
- Cumulative impacts to communities within the REZ
- Impacts to the environment and local amenity
- Property impacts including acquisition and land values
- Feedback and suggestions about community engagement activities.

Landowner sentiment

Of the 35 submissions received during the consultation period, 22 were from local landowners within the revised study corridor. Three of these landowners said they were interested in hosting transmission infrastructure, while 16 indicated they were opposed to hosting transmission infrastructure on their land. Three did not indicate a preference in their submission. In addition to receiving feedback through formal submissions from landowners, EnergyCo also collected additional informal feedback about landowner sentiment through direct discussion with community members at the drop-in information sessions. This informal feedback is not captured for the

purposes of this report (unless the landowner also provided a written submission), however this feedback is being considered by EnergyCo as we carry out further investigation and consultation to refine the transmission route.

Key issues and EnergyCo's responses

Project design

Locations for transmission infrastructure

Issue: Landowner opposition to hosting transmission infrastructure (16 submissions)

Response: One of EnergyCo's key objectives for the consultation period was to understand landowner sentiment about hosting transmission network infrastructure, including transmission easements and energy hubs. This feedback is critical for informing the transmission route.

We appreciate landowners contacting us to inform that they are opposed to hosting transmission infrastructure for various reasons. We are considering this feedback as we further refine the transmission route. Wherever possible, we will avoid locations where landowners are not supportive.

Once we have further refined the corridor, we will work closely with any potentially affected landowners to come to a mutually acceptable agreement about locations for transmission infrastructure that minimises any impacts on existing land uses.

Issue: Specific concerns relating to the location of transmission lines:

- Opposition to transmission infrastructure in the vicinity of Suzanne Road, Tallawang (4 submissions)
- Opposition to being within two kilometres of a 500 kV transmission line (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate there is strong community opposition to transmission infrastructure in some locations, and we are taking this into consideration as we further refine the transmission route. To avoid impacts to residents near the transmission route, we will locate it well away from dwellings wherever possible. We will keep local residents informed once further details are known about the proposed locations for transmission lines.

Issue: Opposed to the use of high quality agricultural land for the transmission route (4 submissions)

Response: We understand there is strong community sentiment that impacts to agricultural land must be avoided and this is a key consideration as we develop the project.

EnergyCo has developed the revised study corridor for the REZ transmission network infrastructure with the aim of minimising impacts to the community wherever possible. This includes locating the transmission route along mining areas, next to existing transmission easement corridors and within renewable generation projects where practical. In doing so, we are looking to minimise the amount of agricultural land that needs to be impacted or acquired to build the new transmission infrastructure.

We are carefully considering feedback from the community in relation to this issue and are assessing options to help avoid impacts to high quality agricultural land through the study corridor. We are committed to developing a design solution which avoids or minimises impacts on cropping land and other sensitive land uses.

Issue: Support for the study corridor moving away from the Merriwa Cassilis Plateau (4 submissions)

Response: We appreciate feedback received from the community in support of the revised study corridor. EnergyCo has developed the revised study corridor to reduce impacts on sensitive land uses in the region and enable us to deliver greater capacity to meet future energy needs. In particular, the eastern section of the previous study corridor has been redesigned to avoid high-quality agricultural land on the Merriwa Cassilis plateau, with the majority of the new corridor now located on land owned by mining companies, alongside existing transmission lines, or wind and solar development areas.

Issue: Support for the revised study corridor because it:

- Uses public land, mining land and existing power line easements (3 submissions)
- Has moved away from high quality agricultural land onto existing mining sites (1 submission)
- Avoids remnant vegetation and areas of high biodiversity (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate feedback received from the community in support of the revised study corridor. To help minimise impacts to landowners and reduce the amount of agricultural land that will be impacted, much of the new corridor is now located on land owned by mining companies, alongside existing transmission lines, or wind and solar development areas. We have also developed the corridor to avoid significant areas of remnant vegetation where possible.

Issue: Suggestions that the transmission route should avoid environmentally sensitive locations:

- Biodiversity offset areas (3 submissions)
- Threatened species habitat (1 submission)
- Areas of remnant vegetation (1 submission)

Response: The revised study corridor has been developed to avoid areas of existing vegetation to minimise impacts to biodiversity where possible.

Impacts to the environment from the REZ transmission network infrastructure will be further investigated as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), including an assessment of potential biodiversity impacts in accordance with the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This will include detailed field based environmental studies and assessments to understand the potential impacts of the construction and operation of the project, as well as mitigation measures aimed at avoiding, minimising and managing any potential impacts identified as part of the environmental assessment process.

Issue: Interested in hosting transmission infrastructure on the property (3 submissions)

Response: Thank you to local landowners who have advised they are interested in hosting transmission infrastructure on their properties. We will contact landowners over the coming months if their properties are identified as suitable for hosting transmission infrastructure.

Issue: The agricultural land value of the revised study corridor is equal to or greater than that of the Merriwa-Cassilis Plateau (1 submission)

Response: We acknowledge that high quality agricultural land exists in various locations in the Central-West Orana REZ and we are committed to minimising impacts to this land and other sensitive land uses wherever possible. While it may not be feasible to avoid all agricultural land for the transmission route, we will engage with landowners to find mutually agreeable solutions to minimise potential impacts on agricultural productivity in the first instance to avoid the need to compulsorily acquire land used for agricultural purposes.

In relation to the Coolah region, we appreciate the concerns raised by local residents about potential land use impacts from the transmission route connecting the Uarbry energy hub to the Liverpool Range Wind Farm. We are taking this into consideration and will continue to work closely with landowners to identify a route which minimises impacts to valuable cropping land and other sensitive land uses.

Issue: Suggestions for where to locate transmission lines within private property (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate feedback from landowners about possible locations for transmission infrastructure, including suggestions for specific locations for transmission infrastructure within private property. We are taking these suggestions into consideration and will continue to consult with potentially affected landowners as we further refine the transmission route.

Issue: Suggestion that the transmission route could follow the line through the Ulan mining areas as this land is already cleared and it would impact fewer landowners (1 submission)

Response: The revised study corridor has been developed to follow existing mining areas between Wollar and Ulan. EnergyCo is consulting with the landowners to help inform the transmission route into, through and exiting these mining areas.

Issue: The new transmission corridor should follow existing transmission lines (1 submission)

Response: The revised study corridor has been developed to follow existing transmission easements where practical, including the existing 330kV line between Wollar and Wellington. However, the proposed transmission line cannot be entirely co-located with existing transmission easements to enable new renewable energy projects to be connected to the grid.

Issue: Interest in locations for possible extensions of the REZ network infrastructure (1 submission)

Response: In our February 2022 Project Overview, possible extensions were identified to the north and west of the Elong Elong energy hub, and south from Elong Elong towards Lake Burrendong. EnergyCo will develop plans for additional energy hubs and transmission lines in the REZ to respond to further development of renewable energy projects as required. We will keep the community fully informed about any plans to extend transmission lines if they become available.

Issue: Request to move transmission infrastructure and generation projects to Wollar where there is an existing substation (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo is delivering new transmission infrastructure to ensure the electricity generated from sufficiently advanced solar and wind developments within the REZ can be transported to energy consumers. Without new transmission network infrastructure within the REZ, the existing high voltage transmission network would not be able to meet the forecast consumer demand for energy generation, taking into account the planned retirement of coal fired power stations.

To enable the efficient connection of renewable generation projects, three energy hubs have been proposed in key locations at Elong Elong, Merotherie and Uarbry due to their proximity to major planned wind and solar generation developments. Energy hubs are where electricity will be collected from renewable energy projects and transferred to the existing Transgrid network. Building new energy hubs within the REZ close to major renewable generation projects will help to reduce and consolidate transmission impacts to landholders and the community.

The locations for new energy hubs have been identified based on their proximity to major renewable generation projects to minimise the length of connecting transmission lines from generation projects to each energy hub and to reduce impacts to local landowners.

Issue: Opposed to an energy hub being located near the property due to impacts to traffic volumes on local roads (1 submission)

Response: We understand there is concern about the potential impacts to local residents during the construction and operation of the energy hubs. We are still in the early phases of the project and will carry out further investigations to determine the expected impacts and what measures we will take to reduce and manage these impacts. As part of the environmental assessment process for the REZ network infrastructure, we will prepare an EIS which will provide detailed information about the potential environmental and community impacts of the project during construction and operation. Potential changes to traffic volumes on local roads, and impacts to road network performance as a result of these changes, will be addressed in the EIS in consultation with local councils and Transport for NSW.

We are engaging a Network Operator to build and operate the REZ transmission network and will work closely with them to develop and implement mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of the project, including traffic on local roads. We will keep the community informed about any proposed changes or impacts to local traffic conditions as more detailed information becomes available.

Issue: The transmission route should be located within properties which are already hosting renewable energy infrastructure, such as wind farms (1 submission)

Response: The revised study corridor incorporates areas within proposed renewable energy generation projects where practical. In doing so, we are looking to minimise the amount of agricultural land that needs to be impacted and acquired to build the transmission infrastructure.

Issue: What parameters are used to identify the study corridor for REZ network infrastructure (1 submission)

Response: We are considering a number of important factors to determine the locations for new energy hubs and transmission lines:

- location of proposed new generators
- community and landowner feedback
- existing and planned land use
- natural hazards (e.g. bushfire or flood prone land)
- environmental planning requirements
- constructability.

When determining the locations for transmission infrastructure, we will consider all of these factors on balance to develop design solutions which meet engineering operational requirements while also mitigating impacts to communities and the environment.

Issue: Request for further information about the proximity of transmission infrastructure to properties (1 submission)

Response: The exact locations for new transmission infrastructure have not yet been confirmed as this is pending further detailed investigations, design development and consultation with landowners. To minimise impacts to residents, we are looking to keep as far away as practicable from dwellings.

Issue: The transmission route should avoid agricultural land where biodiversity and natural capital methodologies are being used (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate many landowners use their properties for agricultural activities and other sensitive land uses, and we are committed to minimising impacts to these properties wherever possible, including biodiversity. We will work with potentially affected landowners to understand how they use their land and aim to achieve a mutually agreeable solution when planning the transmission route.

Issue: Request for clarification on why the route has changed (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo has developed a revised study corridor to reduce impacts on sensitive land uses in the region and enable us to deliver greater capacity to meet future energy needs. The eastern section of the previous study corridor has been redesigned to avoid high-quality agricultural land on the Merriwa Cassilis plateau, with most of the new corridor located on land owned by mining companies, alongside existing transmission lines, or wind and solar development areas. The western sections of the corridor remain broadly the same as originally proposed by Transgrid.

Environment

General environmental impacts

Issue: Concern about environmental impacts from the proposal (5 submissions)

Response: There is a high level of community interest in how the Central-West Orana REZ will avoid, mitigate or manage impacts on the environment. All projects in the REZ will go through a comprehensive planning and environmental approvals process in accordance with the requirements of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and other relevant legislation, policy and guidelines.

A Scoping Report will be prepared to support EnergyCo's State Significant Infrastructure application for the REZ network infrastructure. The report will be developed based on the preferred transmission route within the revised study corridor. It will present the preliminary environmental assessment of the potential environmental issues that will be covered as part of the EIS. The information and recommendations in the Scoping Report will be used to further inform the options investigations and ongoing design process for the project with an aim to avoid or minimise environmental, economic and social impacts wherever possible.

A referral under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 will be made to the Federal Minister for the Environment for potential impacts to nationally listed threatened ecological communities and species. The Minister will then make a decision if the project requires approval and further assessment under the Act.

The project's EIS will consider a wide range of factors relating to the construction and operation of the project, including biodiversity, traffic, noise, visual impacts, water and drainage, land use, Aboriginal and historic heritage and cumulative impacts.

The EIS is expected to be displayed for public exhibition and comment in late 2023. We will keep the community informed about the expected timing for the public exhibition and opportunities to provide feedback.

Visual amenity

Issue: Impacts to local visual amenity (3 submissions)

Response: To avoid visual amenity impacts to local residents, we will make every effort to locate the transmission route away from dwellings wherever possible. We will also aim to position the transmission infrastructure so that it is out of view of any nearby dwellings. Visual amenity impacts and mitigation measures will be described and assessed in detail as part of the EIS.

Flora and fauna

Issue: Impacts to local wildlife:

- General concern about impacts to local wildlife from the project (2 submissions)
- On-site species assessments should be carried out instead of desktop studies (1 submission)

Response: An assessment of the potential impacts to biodiversity, including local wildlife, will be included as part of the project's EIS. A biodiversity assessment will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Mitigation measures will also be included as part of the biodiversity assessment, which would be implemented to avoid, minimise and manage any impacts to biodiversity during the construction and operation of the project.

The Network Operator engaged to build the new transmission network infrastructure will be required to comply with stringent environmental management requirements in accordance with NSW legislation, environmental licences and project approval conditions.

Heritage

Issue: Impact to cultural heritage sites (1 submission)

Response: Heritage impacts are a key consideration in developing the project and will be thoroughly assessed as part of the environmental planning process. We will carry out on-site and desktop assessments to identify local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage sites. We will also carry out an assessment to determine the potential impacts of the project to cultural heritage during construction and operation, and identify mitigation measures to avoid, minimise and manage these impacts. This will be outlined in detail in the EIS.

Health impacts

Issue: Health impacts near transmission lines, including exposure to electric and magnetic fields:

- Request for further information about health and safety for residents living near transmission infrastructure (2 submissions)
- Concern about a double 500 kV transmission line being built next to an existing 330 kV line and request for information on how far apart the lines need to be to prevent electromagnetic transmission between them (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate there is concern in the community about the presence of electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) from power lines. All equipment that has electrical current flowing through it produces EMFs and everyone is exposed to them on a daily basis from household electrical appliances. The presence of EMFs is an essential part of the electricity process. The transmission of electricity in Australia operates at frequencies which typically result in extremely low frequency EMFs.

The design of the transmission lines, the easement width, the selected route and energy hub locations will ensure that EMF is maintained within required health standards and relevant technical standards to avoid any interaction with existing transmission lines. In addition, locating new transmission lines next to existing transmission lines would not cause an increased health risk from EMFs.

Human health impacts from exposure to EMF have been researched and documented globally, and there are a number of review panels set up by highly respected bodies including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Commission, the US National Institute of Environmental and Health Sciences and the UK National Radiological Protection Board as well as locally in Australia via the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA).

ARPANSA states "there is no established evidence that the exposure to magnetic fields from powerlines substations, transformers or other electrical sources, regardless of the proximity, causes any health effects." Further information is available on ARPANSA's website at arpansa.gov.au/understanding-radiation/radiation-sources/powerlines.

According to the WHO, by using prudent avoidance in route selection and appropriate line design to standards, EMFs are not considered a health risk in relation to power lines. The WHO has stated that "despite the feeling of some people that more research needs to be done, scientific knowledge in this area is now more extensive than for most chemicals. Based on a recent in-depth review of the scientific literature, the WHO concluded that current evidence does not confirm the existence of any health consequences from exposure to low level electromagnetic fields". Further information is available at www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/radiation-electromagnetic-fields.

General

Project governance

Issue: Request for further information about the role of EnergyCo in coordinating the development of generation projects within the renewable energy zone (3 submissions)

Response: EnergyCo is a NSW Government-controlled statutory authority that will lead the delivery of REZs in NSW. EnergyCo has been appointed as the Infrastructure Planner for the Central-West Orana REZ under the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* and is responsible for the planning and development of the new REZ transmission network infrastructure. EnergyCo is leading engagement with the developers of renewable generation projects to coordinate their connections to the REZ transmission network infrastructure.

EnergyCo's responsibilities include:

- Planning and developing the new REZ transmission network infrastructure, including developing the reference scope
- Working with developers of generation projects to plan their connections to the REZ transmission network in an orderly manner
- Acquiring the necessary land and easements for the transmission route
- Managing the environmental planning and approvals process for the network infrastructure
- Consulting with landowners, communities and key stakeholders to inform the development of the network infrastructure
- Overseeing community benefit sharing and social licence initiatives for the REZ
- Leading a competitive process to appoint a Network Operator to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the new transmission infrastructure in the REZ.

Issue: The delivery of the REZ is being rushed to meet energy targets (1 submission)

Response: The NSW Government is taking action now to lead investment in new renewable generation to ensure an orderly transition away from coal. The State's five existing coal fired power stations will progressively close as they reach the end of their operational life, starting with Liddell in 2022-23. These power stations currently provide around three quarters of NSW's electricity supply.

The Central-West Orana REZ will play a pivotal role in underpinning NSW's transition to a cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy sector. The NSW Government has committed to delivering at least three gigawatts of initial power transfer capacity from the REZ.

EnergyCo is working to ensure Stage 1 of the Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure is operational in the mid-2020s in line with renewable generation projects coming online.

General support / opposition

Issue: General opposition to the project (2 submissions)

Response: We acknowledge some members of the community are opposed to the proposed REZ transmission network infrastructure and thank you for providing feedback.

Issue: General support for the renewable energy zone (1 submission)

Response: Thank you for providing feedback in support of the REZ.

Planning approval process

Issue: The change in the study corridor for the transmission infrastructure indicates lack of transparency in the approval process, as the Liverpool Range Wind Farm received planning approval on the basis that the transmission line would be built south to Wollar (1 submission)

Response: The Central-West Orana REZ has attracted a range of private sector investor interest for renewable generation projects, which are currently at various stages in the development planning process, ranging from projects that have already obtained development consent to those at the early feasibility stage.

As the REZ transmission network infrastructure is still in the planning phase, we are working closely with developers to plan where they will connect into the REZ transmission network. We are planning to build new energy hubs close to major planned wind and solar developments to minimise the length of generator connection transmission lines, therefore helping to consolidate impacts within the REZ.

In some instances this may mean the developers will seek to modify their approved plans to take into account new connection lines into the new REZ network infrastructure. Should developers seek to modify existing planning approvals, the modification process will allow the community to provide feedback on the proposed modifications.

We appreciate these changes may be of concern to the community and landowners, particularly when they occur after a project has received planning approval. EnergyCo is committed to progressing the new REZ transmission infrastructure as quickly as possible so we can coordinate developer connections in an orderly manner.

Renewable energy generation projects

Issue: Opposition to solar developments being located on high quality agricultural land (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate community concern that agricultural land is being purchased by private developers for the purposes of building renewable energy generation projects. We recognise that developer interest in energy resources may often coincide with agricultural land uses, potentially increasing competition in some areas within the REZ.

In March 2022, the NSW Government announced the formation of a task force which will review the adequacy of the existing legal and policy framework for managing issues and opportunities from the forecast growth in the renewable energy and agricultural sectors in NSW over the next 20 years. This includes assessing the issues relating to the growth of renewable energy projects on the agricultural sector. More information about this review can be found at dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/lup.

Issue: How will generation projects connect into the new REZ network infrastructure (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo is responsible for engaging with developers of renewable energy generation projects to coordinate their connections into the new REZ transmission network infrastructure. This includes planning where generator connection lines will connect into new energy hubs currently planned at Elong Elong, Merotherie and Uarbry. The general locations for new energy hubs have been identified based on their proximity to major planned wind and solar developments to minimise the length of generator connection transmission lines to each energy hub where practical. Generator connection lines are anticipated to be 330 kilovolts (kV).

Issue: Lack of community consultation on the locations for generation projects (1 submission)

Response: Developers of renewable energy generation projects such as wind and solar farms are responsible for engaging with landowners, communities and stakeholders for the delivery of their projects as part of their individual assessment and approval processes. This includes negotiating with landowners to acquire the

necessary land and property interests needed for the development of their projects. Developers acquire property through mutual agreement only as they do not have authority to compulsorily acquire land.

Renewable energy generation projects are subject to their own planning approval processes under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act), including in most circumstances, the need to prepare an EIS. Community engagement is a key component of this process. The Department of Planning and Environment is responsible for coordinating the assessment of State significant projects under the Act, including large scale renewable energy and electricity transmission infrastructure projects. The department is responsible for managing arrangements of the public exhibition of the EIS and handling of community submissions. This is an essential part of the environmental planning process to ensure that community feedback informs the determination of these projects.

We acknowledge concern from the community about the level of consultation provided and will raise this as we engage with developers to coordinate community consultation within the REZ.

Issue: How will renewable energy generation projects east of the Central-West Orana REZ connect to the new energy hubs (1 submission)

Response: For renewable energy projects outside the REZ, the developers of these projects will work with Transgrid to facilitate their connection into the existing high voltage transmission network.

Issue: Suggestion that the REZ could be replaced with micro-renewables for local communities to remove the need for large-scale generation projects and transmission lines (1 submission)

Response: The NSW Government has committed to delivering at least three gigawatts of initial power transfer capacity from the Central-West Orana REZ.

Large-scale generation projects within the REZ are critical to ensuring an affordable, clean and reliable electricity supply for energy consumers as the State's five existing coal fired power stations close. These power stations currently provide around three quarters of NSW's electricity supply.

While micro-renewables can play a role in small scale local energy security, large scale renewables that are made available to large energy users across NSW via an interconnected REZ and shared network are critical to providing consumers with affordable and reliable electricity.

Issue: What happens to the landscape once generation projects are decommissioned (1 submission)

Response: Renewable generation projects such as solar and wind farms typically have a limited operational lifespan. This can generally be around 20 to 30 years depending on the type of infrastructure. Once a project reaches the end of its operational lifespan, the developer will typically either choose to refurbish the infrastructure or decommission the infrastructure and restore the land to its former use. When projects are decommissioned, this means all structures and equipment are removed from the site and the land is restored. Further details about the future plans for specific projects can be found by contacting the individual developers.

Issue: Request for the name of the Cobbora Solar Farm to be changed (1 submission)

Response: The names of renewable energy projects are determined by the private companies and investors who are developing them. Please contact the developers of individual projects if you have any questions or concerns relating to the name of the project.

Issue: Who ensures developers are compliant with planning approval requirements and what criteria do they have to meet (1 submission)

Response: The Department of Planning and Environment is responsible for coordinating the assessment of all projects subject to assessment and approval under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, including large scale renewable energy and electricity transmission infrastructure projects. This includes ensuring projects are compliant with their planning approval conditions.

As part of the assessment and approval process, the Department issues the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) which outline the assessment requirements for the EIS. They also prepare a whole of government assessment report to assist the consent authority in their determination of the project. The consent authority is generally the Minister for Planning.

Issue: Concern that developers are foreign-owned (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate concern that developers of renewable energy generation projects may be foreign-owned. It is typical for a project of this scale to attract investment interest from both Australian and

international organisations. Having interest from national and international developers helps ensure the project has competitive tension and attracts the best value for money for energy consumers.

Whether the project is ultimately owned by a national or international company, they will be expected to meet all legislative and regulatory requirements which can include the Foreign Investment Review Board, local workforce and First Nations employment rates and the use of local suppliers. This will help to ensure local communities within the Central-West Orana REZ are benefiting from local investment and employment both during construction and operation. The NSW Government has also legislated both REZ community benefits funding and generation developer provided funding for community purposes.

Issue: Visual impact studies provided by developers do not accurately represent the visual impacts of the proposed developments (1 submission)

Response: As developers are responsible for carrying out their own EISs for their projects, we recommend providing this feedback directly to the developers for consideration. This can also be submitted to the Department of Planning and Environment as part of the public exhibition process for formal consideration.

Property

Acquisition

Issue: Compensation for property acquisition and easements:

- Concern that compensation provided to landowners for transmission infrastructure will be insufficient or inequitable, particularly in comparison to the income landowners receive from renewable energy projects such as wind farms (4 submissions)
- Concern about one off payments for hosting easements instead of an annual payment (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo will typically need to acquire private land or easements over private land for the purposes of constructing and operating the new REZ infrastructure, including land energy hubs and transmission lines. The property acquisition process is governed by the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*. The Act contains specific provisions relating to how compensation is to be assessed. This includes an assessment of the market value of the land or property rights being acquired, plus additional forms of compensation depending on individual circumstances.

Currently, the compensation payable under the Act does not include ongoing payments to landowners for hosting transmission easements. EnergyCo is reviewing this approach and will consider how additional forms of compensation may be provided to landowners as part of the REZ community benefit funding initiatives, which are currently under development.

Property values

Issue: Concern about impacts to property values in the local area (2 submissions)

Response: We appreciate there is a strong concern from the community in how the REZ will impact land values. This includes concern about negative impacts to land values due to renewable energy infrastructure and transmission lines reducing local amenity, as well as concern about competition from developers leading to increased property prices.

We will locate transmission lines away from dwellings wherever possible to minimise impacts to neighbouring properties. We will also work with affected landowners when determining the locations for transmission infrastructure to help minimise any impacts to the remaining land use. Impacts to property values will be considered as part of the social impact assessment in the EIS for the REZ transmission network infrastructure.

We recognise that developer interest in energy resources may often coincide with agricultural land uses, therefore increasing competition for land in some areas within the REZ which may result in an increase to property values. The NSW Government recently announced the formation of a task force which will review the legal and policy framework for managing issues and opportunities from the growth in the renewable energy and agricultural sectors in NSW over the next 20 years. This includes assessing the issues relating to the growth of renewable energy projects on the agricultural sector. More information about this review can be found at dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/lup.

Land use impacts

Issue: Request for further details about impacts to landowners in the vicinity of transmission infrastructure, including but not limited to agricultural and business operations, environmental management and property values (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo is committed to working with landowners and communities to minimise impacts on agriculture, mining and other business activities throughout the life of the project. During the planning phase, we will engage with potentially affected landowners to understand how they use their land and their sentiment about hosting transmission infrastructure. This feedback will be critical in informing the design and location of new infrastructure. When planning the transmission route, we will make every effort to avoid dwellings and high value land, minimise fragmentation of blocks, limit construction access and respect the landscape.

As we are in the early development phase of the project, we are still in the process of confirming the transmission route and carrying out investigations to confirm the expected impacts of the project. We will prepare an EIS which will outline further details about the expected social and environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of the new transmission network infrastructure, and will include measures to avoid, minimise and manage these impacts.

Property access

Issue: Staff members are not to visit the property without prior agreement and adherence to property access requirements (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo and its contractors will need to access private land for survey and site investigations to help inform the transmission route. We will always consult with the landowner and seek their consent before entering a property, and we will ask landowners to sign a property access agreement form which documents consent has been given together with outlining any special conditions of entry.

Socio-economic impacts

Cumulative impacts to communities

Issue: Cumulative impacts from:

- Multiple renewable energy projects in the local area (6 submissions)
- Existing coal mines in the local area (2 submissions)

Response: We appreciate cumulative impacts within the REZ are a key concern for local communities. While a project of this scale brings significant investment to the region, this is accompanied by cumulative impacts to communities in the vicinity of multiple renewable energy generation and transmission projects. These may include a wide variety of impacts during construction and operation, such as changes to traffic conditions, visual amenity and workforce accommodation.

In its role as Infrastructure Planner, EnergyCo will work with the developers of renewable generation projects to manage cumulative impacts within the REZ. This will include coordinating specific mitigation strategies around key issues such as worker accommodation and upgrades to local roads. We will keep the community informed about these initiatives as the project progresses.

Agriculture

Issue: Impacts to agriculture:

- General concern about impacts to agricultural activities as a result of the project (4 submissions)
- Impacts to aerial activities in the vicinity of transmission lines, including fire management and agricultural practices carried out by air (3 submissions)

Response: While EnergyCo is planning the transmission route to avoid impacting high quality agricultural land as much as possible, where it is unavoidable there will be locations where we need to acquire property or easement rights through agricultural properties to build transmission lines and energy hubs.

An easement is a right of access to occupy and use part of privately owned land for a particular purpose, while allowing landowners to have continued access and use of the land based on a set of negotiated conditions. While there are some restrictions to the use of land within an easement for electrical transmission lines, many land uses can generally continue as normal. We will work closely with landowners during the acquisition process to explain any restrictions to agricultural activities in the vicinity of the easement.

We will make every effort to avoid putting transmission lines where low flying aerial operations take place. Activities such as crop dusting can generally continue near transmission lines however pilots will need to use caution to avoid the lines and structures. Transmission lines are generally clearly visible from the air even when there is smoke, so aerial firefighting can continue.

We will engage with landholders along the study corridor to ensure the use of land, farming operations and local constraints are identified and considered in the refined route selection process.

Societal impacts

Issue: Impacts to community relationships and mental health:

- Division within the community (3 submissions)
- Mental health impacts to landowners (2 submissions)

Response: We understand there are wide ranging opinions and concerns amongst communities within the REZ. We also acknowledge there is a need to manage the delivery of the REZ in a way that meets the needs of affected landowners and communities as much as possible. This includes delivering transparent and timely engagement activities to keep people informed about the activities that affect them.

EnergyCo is looking to maintain an open dialogue with communities and stakeholders so we can deliver the REZ in a way that reduces cumulative impacts and maintains social licence as much as possible. We welcome feedback from the community and stakeholders to help inform this process.

We encourage any members of the community who are experiencing mental health issues to seek advice from their doctor and access local support services. The Mental Health Line is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1800 011 511 or find more information online at health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth.

Community benefits

Issue: The project is supplying energy consumers on the east coast of NSW, therefore not benefiting the communities where the infrastructure is located (2 submissions)

Response: The electricity generated from the Central-West Orana REZ will be connected to the Transgrid shared network which has 14,000 kilometres of transmission lines traversing much of NSW and supplies electricity to each of the three NSW distribution network providers. This means the electricity generated from the Central-West Orana REZ will benefit all energy consumers in NSW, not just those in cities or along the east coast.

In addition to securing affordable and reliable energy for NSW, the REZ will:

- Bring in more than $5 billion of new investment to the region
- Deliver more than 3,900 jobs in construction
- Provide dedicated funding for community benefit purposes which will be funded by the REZ and the renewable generation projects
- Provide opportunities for local employment and suppliers.

EnergyCo is committed to ensuring the REZ delivers positive outcomes for local communities in the Central-West Orana Region.

Issue: Community benefit funding should be determined by community representatives and not just by Councils (2 submissions)

Response: EnergyCo is consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, including Councils, to help inform the development of community benefit sharing initiatives. We are still in the early planning phase of determining how funding for community benefits will be delivered and will keep the community informed about future opportunities to provide input and feedback.

Impacts to services

Issue: Concern about disruption to telecommunications in the vicinity of transmission infrastructure, including radio, internet and television (1 submission)

Response: Transmission lines generally do not interrupt signals from mobile phone, satellite or GPS signals. Existing transmission lines can sometimes interfere with AM radio frequencies where the signal is already weak, however new transmission lines and towers will be designed to minimise any interference. EnergyCo is also considering opportunities for using the proposed network infrastructure to improve mobile coverage in the region.

Construction

Workforce

Issue: Suggestions on how the construction workforce should be managed:

- Construction workers should be accommodated in temporary camps on a one week on / one week off basis, and local businesses should have the opportunity to tender for the provision of services at accommodation camp sites (1 submission)
- Local accommodation and services should be used to support communities (1 submission)
- What will happen to workers once the construction period finishes? (1 submission)
- Local businesses will not be able to compete for workers (1 submission)

Response: The provision of worker accommodation and services is a key consideration for the REZ network infrastructure and generation projects once they reach the construction phase. We are consulting with a range of stakeholders to determine how this will be delivered while meeting the needs of local residents, businesses and Councils.

We are engaging a Network Operator to build and maintain the REZ transmission infrastructure, and we will work closely with them to determine how the construction workforce will be accommodated and managed. We are also engaging with the developers of generation projects to coordinate these activities where possible.

To support local employment and businesses, the Network Operator will provide opportunities to engage local workers and suppliers where practical during the construction and operational phases. This is expected to include the use of local training providers to develop a local workforce with new skills. However, with the high number of construction projects anticipated to be carried out with the REZ concurrently in the coming years, it will be necessary to engage additional skilled workers from outside the region. This may include workers who relocate to the region or those who live elsewhere and commute on a fly in / fly out (FIFO) or drive in / drive out (DIDO) basis. This is typical for major construction and mining projects that require a large workforce.

We are conscious of local business workforce requirements. We will continue to engage communities, Councils and key stakeholders on how we can minimise negative impacts to communities and businesses resulting from the REZ construction workforce.

Road maintenance and upgrades

Issue: Responsibility for road maintenance and upgrades (3 submission)

Response: The Network Operator engaged to build and operate the new transmission network infrastructure will be responsible for any local road maintenance and upgrades required for the project. Similarly, the developers of renewable generation projects will carry out any required maintenance or upgrades of local roads for their projects. Prior to construction being carried out, pre-condition assessments will be carried out on any local roads which are planned to be used for site access and haulage. This is to provide a record of their condition in case of any damage resulting from construction vehicle traffic. We will work closely with Councils to facilitate this process.

As part of the EIS, we will carry out road transport studies to identify roads that require upgrades and maintenance and wherever possible coordinate this work with other developers so as to minimise impacts to local communities.

General construction impacts

Issue: Temporary impacts to the local community during construction (1 submission)

Response: We understand the construction of major infrastructure projects can be a source of disruption for communities near our work sites. Temporary impacts during construction can include noise and vibration, changes to traffic conditions, night work, parking, haulage and dust. The potential construction impacts from the project will be assessed in detail in the project's EIS. This will also provide details about the range of mitigation measures that will be used to reduce these impacts. During the construction phase, all work will be subject to strict environmental management measures in accordance with the project's planning approval requirements and environmental licences.

Community engagement

Feedback and suggestions

Issue: General feedback about community engagement:

- People should receive payment for participation in consultation activities (2 submissions)
- There was lack of community consultation in declaring the REZs (2 submissions)
- Landowners should be informed if their property is ruled out of the study corridor (1 submission)
- Visualisations or artist's impressions would help show the visual impact (1 submission)
- The project website is difficult to navigate (1 submission)
- A framework is needed to support people through the transition to a REZ (1 submission)
- More communication channels are needed (1 submission)
- EnergyCo should use local communications agencies or employ local staff (1 submission)
- Each local town should have a community reference group (1 submission)
- EnergyCo should provide support to the community in dealing with local impacts and liaising with developers (1 submission)
- EnergyCo should seek advice from local community networks and organisations to seek feedback on how to effectively engage with the community (1 submission)
- Request for a map which shows the locations of the transmission corridor and renewable generation projects so the community can suggest alternative routes (1 submission)

Response: Thank you for the feedback and suggestions about how EnergyCo can engage with the community as we deliver the REZ. All feedback received will be used to inform our future communication and engagement activities for the project. We encourage community members to contact us at any time for more information or to provide further feedback.

Issue: Negative feedback about the revised study corridor consultation:

- A community information session should have been held in Coolah (2 submissions)
- Landowners were not adequately informed about the consultation (2 submissions)
- The communities west and south of Cassilis have not been properly consulted (1 submission)
- Impact to landowners was not communicated clearly at the information sessions (1 submission)
- The distribution of letters to landowners within the revised study corridor was not effective as not all landowners received them and details were inaccurate (1 submission)

Response: We appreciate feedback from the community about how EnergyCo consulted the community on the revised study corridor for the Central West Orana REZ network infrastructure in February and March 2022. We acknowledge some community members were dissatisfied with how we communicated during this period and appreciate the suggestions received to help us improve in future. We are committed to continuous improvement of our engagement approach and welcome any further feedback from the community on how we can better carry out these activities, including additional locations for future community information sessions.

Issue: Request for further information about the proposed community consultive committee for the Central-West Orana REZ (1 submission)

Response: EnergyCo is planning to establish a Community Reference Group for the Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure which will include representatives from local communities and key stakeholder groups. We will provide further details in mid-2022 about how people can apply to join the Community Reference Group.

Next steps

The feedback outlined in this report is being considered in further refining the transmission route and has been used to inform the development of the project's Scoping Report. The Scoping Report is targeted for submission to the Department of Planning and Environment in the third quarter of 2022 and will include further details about the proposed locations for the REZ transmission network infrastructure.

Following this, the next key milestone the Central West Orana REZ network infrastructure will be the public exhibition of the Environmental Impact Statement which is planned for late 2023.

We thank everyone who took time to review the revised study corridor and provide feedback. We will continue to work closely with local landowners and communities as the project progresses and we will keep people informed about future opportunities to provide feedback.

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