

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Community Reference Group (CRG) South - Meeting 3

Held on: Tuesday 1 July 2025 – 5pm to 7.30pm

At: STEM Innovation Lab, Donald Horne Building, 140 Bridge Street, Muswellbrook

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

Attended

Chairperson	Margaret Harvie
Community Representatives	Ninna Douglas Mac McLeod Linda Taylor* Brigitte Thomas Robert Warren
LALC Representatives	Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council – Noel Downs Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council – De-Anne Douglas
LGA delegates	Upper Hunter Shire Council – Councillor Adam Williamson Muswellbrook Shire Council – Mayor Jeff Drayton
EnergyCo Representatives	Julian Watson, New England Deputy Project Director Michael Burden, New England REZ Coordination Director Darren Clarke, Director Regional Coordination Laura Hoffman, New England REZ Biodiversity Manager Cleo Andrews, New England Communications and Engagement Lead Sara Crowe, New England Community Engagement Manager Melissa Maurer, New England Place Manager
Note taker	Kate McGrath
*online attendance	

Apologies

Kate Whitehead

Valley Alliance

Declarations of interest

Member	Details
Kate Whitehead	Pecuniary interest: Acting for Upper Hunter Shire Council in relation to the Maizewood Battery Energy Storage System Project at Aberdeen, NSW.

	Potentially acting for a landholder in negotiations with a Turnbull Renewables entity in relation to the proposed Scott Creek Windfarm located at Willow Tree, NSW.
Brigitte Thomas	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Robert Warren	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Mac MacLeod	Pecuniary interest: Landholder within EnergyCo proposed transmission line corridor.
Linda Taylor	Pecuniary interest: MBC Recruitments intend to tender for paid recruitment contracts.
Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council – Noel Downs	Pecuniary interest: Nungaroo land may be included in the transmission line corridor
Kate McGrath	Non-pecuniary interest: Kate is the Employment Facilitator for the New England North West Local Jobs Program which provides funding and support for workforce development in the renewables sector. Pecuniary interest: Investor in Sapphire Windfarm.
Margaret Harvie	Margaret is paid by Energy Co as the Chairperson. She has advised generators on community engagement and delivers a community engagement training course which generators participate in.

Agenda item discussion and actions

Item 1. Acknowledgement of Country

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

Item 2. Welcome and housekeeping

- Chair welcomed members and outlined structure of meeting
- Introductions

Item 3. Pecuniary interests

- Chair reviewed interests and invited questions
- Question from CRG member as to who is paying the chair.

Response: EnergyCo has engaged the independent Chair.

- Comment from CRG member that it's the job of the chair to be an impartial third party and be neutral, and this is perhaps not possible if Chair is paid by and therefore reporting back to EnergyCo, Member questioned how impartial the Chairperson can be if employed by EnergyCo.
- Comment from CRG member that professional arbitration typically includes an unrelated third party.
- Chair stated this CRG is set up in line with Community Consultative Committees required as part of conditions of approval by Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. They are in all known cases paid by the proponent.
- Question from CRG member to other members as to whether there is a view that someone else should be paying for CRG facilitation, other than EnergyCo.
- Comment from CRG member that laws regarding unfair practice and misleading representation are federal and override state, and we need to be aware of big brother and the state government practice to referee.
- Chair stated this matter had been raised in a formal complaint from some members, however no one had previously raised this in the meetings. The complaint was the first time these concerns had come to the Chair or to EnergyCo's attention.
- Comment from CRG member that this is a feedback group and people didn't feel they were able to provide feedback.
- Chair stated the complaint had been raised with her professional association, who had advised the matter did not require any further action.
- Comment from CRG member that there is no need to unpack this further when the response to the lodged complaint did not seem to lead to any concerns from the parties to whom the complaint was lodged.
- Comment from CRG member asking who the complainant thought should chair and what the fix is.
- Comment from CRG member that finding someone impartial or neutral who is not paid by EnergyCo will be difficult
- EnergyCo confirmed the main concerns raised by CRG members seemed to be about the process to ensure voices are heard and ensuring that there is good governance.
- Chair stated she was open to any comment or conversation about conflicts, and the time to raise it is in this pecuniary interest agenda item that is at the start of each meeting.

Item 4. Noting of previous actions

Chair noted the action register had been shared prior to the CRG meeting.

	Action	Responsible	Status
1.	Check back with members re attention to detail and timeliness of EnergyCo communication and engagement.	EnergyCo	Ongoing.
2.	Questions for biodiversity specialists to be emailed through to Chair prior to meeting if possible.	CRG members	Complete.
3.	Actions will be numbered and assigned a timeframe for delivery.	Margaret Harvie	Complete. All actions have been numbered and EnergyCo committed to close out actions prior to the following meeting or to provide an update on actions where further investigation is required.
4.	New actions or requests received outside of meetings added to register to ensure updates are shared and progress is tracked.	Margaret Harvie	<p>EnergyCo will develop a Questions Register, similar to the existing Action Register. This register will capture questions raised by members, along with responses provided by the project team.</p> <p>The Questions Register will be shared with the CRG whenever new questions and responses are added, to ensure all members have access to the same information and updates.</p> <p>Please continue to submit any questions via email and they will be captured in the register for follow-up.</p>
5.	EnergyCo will commence advertising and Chair will select a new replacement member.	Melissa Maurer	Complete. Mac McLeod appointed.
6.	CRG members will be advised when application process is open so they can share information about the vacancy.	Chair	Complete. Email shared on 14 May 2025.

	Action	Responsible	Status
7.	Send information from EnergyCo to members about Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme and acquisition compensation.	Julian Watson	Information is available on Energy Co website to explain the land acquisition process, how compensation works and the Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the land acquisition process EnergyCo • Valuation and compensation explained EnergyCo • Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme explained EnergyCo You can also refer to the fact sheet on property and easement acquisition .
8.	Explanation of Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme, acquisition compensation, and other payments at future meeting.	Julian Watson	To be included as an agenda item for a future CRG meeting.
9.	Send out information to CRG members about First Nations Guidelines when available.	Leanne Thompson via Chair	To be sent once available.
10.	Present about First Nations Guidelines at future meeting.	Leanne Thompson	To be presented at future CRG meeting once more information is available.
11.	Distribute links for Central-West Orana REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program.	Julian Watson	The latest information on the Central West Orana Community Employment Benefit Program is provided on our EnergyCo website , or sign up for updates here .
12.	Community and Employment Benefit Program to be discussed at CRG meeting in September.		To be included as an agenda item for September meeting.
17.	Link for NSW Legislative Council inquiry into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales to be distributed with slides.	Chair	Complete. Included in CRG presentation shared on the website.

	Action	Responsible	Status
18.	Link to NSW Renewable Energy and Transmission Landholder Guide to be distributed.	Melissa Maurer	Complete. Included in CRG presentation shared on the website.

- Request from Chair as to whether CRG members feel any actions are not being followed up.
- Comment from CRG member that the action items are just information items and not decision making, discussion on this point having been dealt with previously.
- Comment that emails came too late on Friday and should have been distributed earlier.

Response: EnergyCo agree and will endeavour in the future to have the action register distributed sooner.

Item 5. Meeting procedures

- Complaint against Chair has been lodged with the IAP2 professional association. Chair explained that CRG has limitations set by EnergyCo.
- The complaint questioned if Chair was upholding professional ethics.
- Chair explained concept of IAP2 spectrum, and the fundamental principle of being honest with the community and their capacity for influence at any given time. CRG is in the most part at the consult level of the spectrum, and Chair cannot force EnergyCo to allow for decision making by this group and it would be ethically dishonest to lead group to believe they are operating in the ‘collaborate’ or ‘empower’ section of spectrum.
- Comment from CRG member that this group is in the ‘Inform’ stage.

Response: Chair stated the highest level of the spectrum for the CRG is likely the Consult level and the way the Spectrum works is that it assumes that this also includes levels of less influence including ‘Inform’.

- Chair acknowledged that EnergyCo has dominated the CRG meetings to date. The Chair reminded the group that it was suggested that this would be the case for early meetings. Bringing everyone to the same level of understanding requires a high level of input and requires EnergyCo to provide a lot of information. This will change with more community input as we progress.
- Comment from CRG member that when any party affects other people they need to know if they are on good legal, solid ground and speaker does not believe this was considered by EnergyCo and there is a legal precedent in consumer law.
- Comment from CRG member that human input is needed.
- Comment from CRG member that route was pre-determined.
- Comment that this is a typical corporate and government methodology.

- Comment that Chair is not independent enough because she stated she is unable to change things instead of stating she will note and share the comment made.

Response: Chair stated EnergyCo are in the room and part of the conversation and are noting feedback directly.

- Comment from CRG member that EnergyCo is a government department, and things haven't changed in 20 years.
- Chair requested feedback on which additional items have not and should be included on the agenda, as this was one of the mentioned concerns in the lodged complaint.
- Comment from CRG member that the Chair looks at EnergyCo staff to take instruction, and CRG members feel Chair is not impartial and when people are speaking, they are shut down. Comment that members don't feel heard.

Response: Chair stated EnergyCo is a big machine with lots of activity and staff, the Chair is not part of the EnergyCo machine and therefore needs to take guidance from EnergyCo on where activity and information is up to before promising to bring information to the CRG.

- Clarification sought from Chair as to whether group would prefer less items with more space to speak. This was agreed.
- Suggestion from EnergyCo for an online survey to understand what agenda topics members are interested in. CRG members seemed to appreciate this idea.
- Comment from CRG member asking what will happen at specific properties and that the landholder saw a photo of transmission towers which measured 25mx25m at their base and these will be placed on their property. CRG member would like to know the logistics of getting 220 cubes (m³) of concrete per hole into the property and how will his road be affected, given that B Doubles aren't allowed on it, and a proposed compound would cut off the only access road.

Response: A dedicated Place and Property manager is available to answer these property-specific questions for impacted landowners. Advised an upcoming online session may also answer some of these questions.

- Comment from CRG member that infrastructure for public good should go on public land.
- Statement from Chair that all feedback is accepted in the meeting and questions will be answered. There is also need to balance the interests of various members - bring people up to speed and find a rhythm of the meetings that works for all.
- Chair stated the meeting procedure will be changed to reduce the amount of time EnergyCo is speaking, and agenda will have less items. The presenter will present ideally uninterrupted, and each member will be invited to make a comment, question or statement.
- Comment from CRG member that members should be able to make presentations and give direct feedback.

Response: Reminder from Chair it was communicated at previous meetings that initial meetings would require a lot of information from EnergyCo. More discussion and member input would come in future meetings.

- Comment from CRG member that 7 hours of meetings have occurred, and it's taken too long for them to have a say.
- Comment from CRG member asking what EnergyCo want from the CRG.

Response: EnergyCo wants to know the burning issues and opportunities, such as legacy infrastructure. What will make it a successful project from the CRG perspective.

- Comment from CRG member that members shouldn't be worried about what EnergyCo want, the role of the CRG is to represent the community perspective and share that with EnergyCo and tell them the message. It should be a bottom-up reference group not a top-down. Broad agreement from members.
- Reminder from the Chair to members to exercise courtesy and not interrupt.
- Comment from CRG member that in an initial meeting mapping the route EnergyCo made a statement that was untrue. When Ausgrid joined the conversation on Hunter Central Coast REZ, communication was better.
- Comment from CRG member that EnergyCo must not make promises to Aboriginal organisations about what will be provided to Aboriginal communities without clarity. It was emphasised that EnergyCo needs to clearly distinguish between what is intended specifically for Aboriginal communities and what is for the broader community – particularly if they come from the same funding source. Communication on this must be open and transparent. Comment from CRG member that communication has been poor and the average person has no idea about the progress of the project, and clarity and clear timeframes are needed.
- Frustration expressed from CRG member that their role is to take information back to the community, but expressed concern that information often feels pushed for, rather than freely and proactively shared.
- Comment from CRG member there's a perception that EnergyCo is focused on ticking boxes and shutting down discussion, which is making the community feel angry and fearful. They expressed a desire to see more support for communities to work through their concerns.
- Comment from CRG member that these projects are for the good of people in the city but not the country, and policy regarding water licensing and deforestation has caused issues in the past. The government has reneged on promises regarding input costs and now the water-sharing plan is the same thing, project needs a social licence that is fair, reasonable, and open to information. Poles and wires have turned land into a strategic target.
- Chair explained she has control over the process of the meeting to create the environment to have the required dialogue with the hope this will achieve some of the groups stated objectives.

- Comment from CRG meeting that people want to know what their rights are, what their protections are, and details of compulsory acquisition.
- Chair asked if CRG want to move through the agenda or continue general discussion.
- Discussion continued about bushfire, koalas and lightning strikes.
- EnergyCo representative asked if the CRG were asking EnergyCo to build social licence through transparency. There was broad agreement that this was the request.
- Comment from online CRG attendee that they chose to join online as meetings sometimes miss the opportunity to provide useful information. They suggested the group should be clearer about what it wants to get out of the meetings, which could help shape future agendas.

Item 6. Biodiversity offsets

- Presented by Darren Clarke, Director for Regional Coordination.
- Overview of how biodiversity offsets will be delivered in the New England REZ.
- Noted that EnergyCo's primary obligation is to avoid and minimise impacts to biodiversity, then EnergyCo will offset (compensate for) what impacts cannot be avoided.
- Notwithstanding the need to avoid and minimise impacts to biodiversity, it was noted that, considering the scale of the project, impacts to biodiversity values would occur, offset liability for this project is expected to be high as the project requires a substantial area of vegetation to be cleared in different locations.
- Traditional offset model has evolved, and Minister has approved the introduction of REZ wide Conservation Investment Strategies by NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) to support a more coordinated approach to conservation investment within all REZs, including New England. The strategies are also intended to identify conservation priorities for the region.
- In addition, an amendment to Biodiversity Conservation Regulation on 9 May 2025 introduced ability to enter into a Strategic Offset Delivery Agreement (SODA) which, once offset liability is determined, allows EnergyCo to enter an agreement with DCCEEW, who will deliver offsets on behalf of project, it's still 'like for like' credits and full the liability must still be delivered.
- The regulatory amendment only allows proponents of transmission projects, renewable energy generation and long duration storage projects within a REZ to enter into SODAs.
- Direct investment to evidence-based conservation.
- After the introduction of Conservation Investment Strategies for each REZ was approved by the Minister for Environment, there was instruction from Government for EnergyCo to no longer independently pursue offsets; instead, an expectation that EnergyCo's offset obligation must be met in collaboration with DCCEEW via a SODA to establish foundational investments.

- Every EnergyCo project is anticipated to enter into a SODA with DEECCW.
- Central West Orana REZ Conservation Investment Strategy will likely be published this week. New England REZ doesn't have a draft yet. It should be finalised by Q3 2025.
- DCCEEW is assisting with creating offset delivery cost estimates (i.e. the total cost of the project's offset liability) which provides certainty from a regulatory perspective from cost certainty, avoiding market volatility and providing best value for energy consumers (which EnergyCo must demonstrate to the Consumer Trustee).
- Entering into Strategic Offset Delivery Agreements transfers responsibility for delivery to the Environmental Agency Head (i.e. the Secretary of DEECCW), with a 3-year timeframe for the agency head to fully meet the project's offset liability.
- This new offset delivery mechanism is a material change for New England REZ, as EnergyCo has now ceased engagement in exploring offset options directly with landowners.
- Strategic Offset Delivery Agreements provide compliance certainty, utilise expertise within DEECCW for resource efficiency and reduce probity risks.
- Opportunities for landowners - Individual landowners may feel they have lost an opportunity with EnergyCo, but they still have the option to participate in the offset program with DCCEEW.
- Provision of information from DEECCW through online and in-person briefing sessions.
- Benefit to landowners include opportunities that will extend beyond EnergyCo projects.
- Landowners can view DCCEEW Stewardship Support Program; next session is on 6th August.
- Scale of offsetting required for New England REZ is significant, and other measures will be a key component for delivering offsets.
- EnergyCo asked members if there would be value in DCCEEW briefing the CRG directly regarding SODA and Conservation Investment Strategy, including First Nations outcomes. There was broad agreement from members.

Action: EnergyCo to request DCCEEW brief CRG about New England REZ Conservation Investment Strategy

- Advocating for First Nations benefits in the conservation strategy.
- Chair stated this has been an anticipated topic and timing of this on the agenda has been helpful because there is more certainty around the way offsets will occur than had been the case for the first meeting in February.
- Comment from CRG member wanting to know the timeframe and the extra cost compared to other methods like undergrounding.

Response: Undergrounding of transmission requires complete clearing, which does not align with avoidance and minimisation principles and is cost prohibitive. Transmission lines provide an opportunity to retain some vegetation under the transmission lines, which retains a level

of biodiversity. The selective removal of canopy trees and retention of shrubs and grasses is known as partial clearing.

- Strategic Offset Delivery Agreements have an upper limit fee capping and any costs savings for delivery of offsets under a SODA are returned to consumers, so the cost savings benefit is retained by the people.
- Comment from CRG member requesting copy of presentation and conservation investment strategy and asking how there will be like-for-like retention to avoid concern about the local impact.

Response: DCCEEW would be best placed to explain the approach and priorities will be outlined in the Conservation Investment Strategy, which is currently being developed for the New England. Threatened species habitat will require like-for-like land and habitat to be acquired in proximity to project. Other conservation and active land management actions will likely be included in the conservation investment strategy, such as planting and habitat restoration.

- Comment from CRG member they are looking forward to DCCEEW presentation and its important information for landholders. It's important to ensure perception and reality align.

Response: DCCEEW briefing will occur when the draft Conservation Investment Strategy can be shared.

- Comment from CRG member asking if Minister got worried about cost and implemented this.

Response: DCCEEW advocated for the development of the Conservation Investment Strategies.

- Comment from CRG member asking why EnergyCo isn't following existing transmission lines.

Response: There are multiple constraints which were considered during the route selection process, including the need to maintain reliability of energy supply secured through existing transmission lines.

- Comment from CRG member that dealing with layers of government has resulted in broken promises and there is no trust.

Response: EnergyCo is working closely with councils to ensure alignment of conservation initiatives and priorities. DCCEEW has consulted with Hunter based Councils in the drafting of the Hunter Conservation Investment Strategy and this is expected to be replicated for New England.

- Comment from CRG member expressing interest in Central West Orana REZ Conservation Investment Strategy document.
- CRG member asked if EnergyCo is going to take the money required for offsetting and hand it to DCCEEW.

Response: Yes.

- CRG member asked if there is a clear budget for biodiversity offsets for the project.

Response: A clear figure will not be able to be produced until the Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (that supports the EIS) is completed to provide an estimate. The Conservation Investment Strategy and Environmental Impact Statement are separate documents, EnergyCo retains responsibility for meeting project's Conditions of Approval as part of the environmental assessment and approval process.

- CRG member asked how the amount paid is determined.

Response: The amount is based on the total number of biodiversity credits required to offset project impacts. These credits are calculated using a biodiversity assessment that identifies the species and vegetation types affected. The impact footprint (i.e. areas of clearing) is entered into a calculator, which determines the credit requirements. The total cost includes both the credit purchase and associated administrative and delivery costs. DCCEW then utilise available market data and pricing to determine the cost to deliver all credits required to offset the impacts.

- CRG member asked why it's not being managed by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT).

Response: DCCEW and BCT have a relationship and the approach is collaborative. Importantly, DCCEW have an established Nature Markets and Offsets team that have access to all offset market mechanisms to secure offsets for a project.

- EnergyCo confirmed generators retain the option to pursue offsets independently or can offset under this scheme (i.e. via a SODA).

Item 7. Break

- Break for dinner 6.35pm – 6.45pm

Item 8. REZ-wide studies

- Presented by Michael Burden, NEREZ Coordination Director.
- Legislative context of delivery is the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act.
- Broader role EnergyCo can play in learning opportunities and leaving a legacy.
- Benefits and impacts are the two sides of the transition.
- Community benefits are the intentional positive outcomes for host communities which add value.
- Avoid significant unmanaged consequence and maintain regional wellbeing.
- Address significant areas of wellbeing.
- Seeking to understand landscape and address potential impact.

6.49pm Linda Taylor left meeting due to battery running low.

- Study areas for workforce accommodation, waste and circular economy, water and wastewater, local supply chain and training and skills are complete, and information can be shared.

- Intent is to guide and consider priorities in collaboration with councils, government and community.
- Process and role of REZ-wide studies is to understand the empirical nature of key areas through consultation, in region sessions with industry and First Nations representatives, gain understanding of baseline conditions.
- Studies quantify the baseline conditions and consider the cumulative impact of REZ infrastructure and generation projects and consider how impacts can be mitigated.
- Studies help government and stakeholders to be clear on what happens next.
- New England and Central West Orana have differences and similarities, with New England REZ-wide studies being undertaken well in advance of any impacts commencing, providing an opportunity to understand what can be done collectively.
- Regional forums like CRG, coalition of councils, community engagement, seeking information and feedback to determine where mitigation measures should be applied.
- Studies significant in breadth and depth, and participant feedback is being considered before studies are finalised.
- Studies were referred to as the ‘end of the beginning’. They allow government to learn and consider what happens next.
- Studies were developed with a range of inputs, publicly available information, direct engagement with generator developers, departmental info, project knowledge and expertise, industry benchmarking and stakeholder engagement.
- All of impacted area considered in study (i.e., wider than just the declared REZ boundary).
- Study approach began with baseline assessment looking at current capacity for facilities, infrastructure and programs, then considered the demand estimated for the future as a result of the projects (transmission lines, renewable and non-renewable projects) and associated infrastructure and then a gap analysis.
- Intent is to release the studies, and community will be invited to provide feedback. This is an opportunity for some areas to have an even greater level of engagement and collaboration.
- Five studies on the agenda for today’s discussion include workforce accommodation, waste and circular economy, waste and wastewater, local supply chain, training and skills.
- Comment from CRG member that land value and lifestyle impacts are not being considered in REZ wide studies and loss for one group to benefit another is exploitation.

Response: There is a legislated and specified process for landowners and that’s why it isn’t considered in the REZ wide studies, but a social impact analysis will be undertaken for REZ and transmission corridor, including in the EIS. Range of things that aren’t covered in EIS to full extent are included in studies.

- EnergyCo asked CRG members if they wanted to focus the discussion given the limitations of meeting time. Group advised they would like to focus the discussion on workforce accommodation and water and wastewater as a priority.
- Workforce accommodation study looks at the empirical nature, looking at how to accommodate the workforce and opportunities to leave a legacy.
- Baseline assessment for a small population growth in centres with some declining, low rental vacancies, approximately 1700 rooms for rent across the entire study area.
- Demand assessment indicates approximately 7000 jobs in operational and construction, temporary accommodation will be needed, Tamworth has highest demand for permanent dwellings.
- Potential opportunities include economic revitalisation, housing development potential to transition temporary accommodation into permanent housing. Thinking about opportunity early is critical to it being realised, engagement with local housing and community housing providers to understand the mix is vital, mindful of distance between work and housing, temporary accommodation solutions could be multi-project mix.
- Water and wastewater study identified generally sufficient volume of raw water across the entire system in an average year and that dry years present a challenge, but that local solutions will be required noting the challenges in identifying, accessing, transporting and trading water.
- Solution required for adequate potable water treatment capacity during peak construction.
- Modelling suggests from a wastewater perspective most LGAs can accommodate the REZ, except for Liverpool Plains however more work required to determine the exact localised solutions.
- Ensuring water is available will mean collaborating with councils and thinking about how water managers and users can minimise demand and undertake planning projects, and what individual solutions projects can develop.
- Options might include improving efficiency of existing infrastructure, like upgrades or augmentations, policy changes, stimulating water trading markets, infrastructure optimisations, etc. in an attempt to reduce impact.
- Chair invited contributions from CRG members.
- Comment from CRG member that theoretically there is enough water, but not enough stored water.
Response: At a macro level there is enough available water, so identifying the mix is vital, including tanking water in, onsite treatment and accessing local capacity.
- Comment from CRG member that Tamworth region has an organisation called Upper Namoi Water and Landscape Initiative and Energy should reach out to them.

- Comment from CRG member that Muswellbrook has considered these factors and are a long way toward workforce accommodation and have enough water. The view of Council is they are expecting 4500-5000 workers up until 2030. Different blocks of land have been identified for temporary worker accommodation, considering the government guidelines. High-quality housing can provide legacy for tourist accommodation, aged care, 12-14 projects have been approved with more to come. The view is there must be legacy for the community and need to convince the community that coal to renewable transition is good, and there is some benefit. Not unlike other communities in regional NSW, Muswellbrook is experiencing housing shortages with all available accommodation currently used. On the way to having some quality housing and a positive legacy which is connected to town water and waste. Want to bring workers into the community.

- Comment from CRG member that access to properties and water needed for concrete is impossible to manage. 40 gigalitres of water plus showering and watering workers is not an inconsequential amount.

Response: Individual circumstances at a single property are not considered in the study, it looks purely at the macro resource and then sub-regional analysis. The base load of water as a resource is deemed adequate, the management becomes the question.

- Comment from CRG member supporting the need for the legacy to be the right one.
- Comment from CRG member stating Upper Hunter and Muswellbrook Councils collaborate well together and there is worker movement between the two shires, and conversations about legacy housing have been had, with the struggles to supply low-income housing identified.
- Comment from CRG member that peak construction period falls within a cyclical dry time and within the fire cycles, and Council support preparation of Rural Fire Service (RFS) for emergency events and need some support with that. Upper Hunter has multiple water problems and not much clean water, with recent flood events and issues around wastewater with the system being almost at capacity. Transition of workforce means there will be impacts and the system will require an upgrade.
- Comment from CRG member that Tamworth has no accommodation for extended periods, and a closer look at the plans would be appreciated to inform community.
- Comment from CRG member that the problem is other REZs exist and there can be interconnection of workers. Robbing Peter to pay Paul with water when we are drought prone, and this happening in dry times, will compete with RFS.
- Public “Have Your Say” period will be held to understand key community priorities and opportunities, which will inform the development of the initiatives associated with the studies.
- The Have Your Say period will include an online community survey, community information sessions and targeted stakeholder interviews.

- This approach was developed following feedback from Central West Orana on preferred means of consultation to get the best possible data to feed into Community Benefit initiatives.
- EnergyCo requested members to recommend groups with key interests in REZ wide study areas which may be considered for stakeholder interviews.

Item 9. First Nations engagement

- Presented by Melissa Maurer
- Engagement with LALCs and First Nation representatives is ongoing.
- First Nations briefing held in Tamworth on 5 June.
- Social impact assessment information shared by email, including overview of interviews with community groups and key stakeholders and a community survey.
- EnergyCo thanked CRG members for their support to share details of the community survey, which helped increase the number of responses to 532.
- Social Impact Assessment interviews with LALCs will be undertaken after NAIDOC Week.

Item 10. General business and questions

- Comment from CRG member about impact of REZ on potential European Union free trade agreement.

Response: There has been conversation with Meat and Livestock Australia.

	Action	Responsible	Due/status
1.	EnergyCo to invite DCCEEW to brief CRG about Strategic Offset Delivery Agreements	Darren Clarke	Prior to next CRG meeting
2.	Invitation to online meetings to be sent	Chairperson	8 August 2025

Actions carried over

3	Send out information to CRG members about First Nations Guidelines when available.	Leanne Thompson via Chair	To be sent once available
4	Creation of register of questions asked by members between meetings	Melissa Maurer	Mid-August 2025

Next meeting

Proposed for Wednesday 24 September 2025 in Tamworth.

Plans to cover other topics requested

Online sessions (North and South combined)

- Topic 1: An overview of the network infrastructure to be delivered for the project
- Topic 2: Explainer of EIS and supporting studies
- Dates proposed are week commencing 18th August and 1st September
- Members agreed these weeks would be suitable for the online sessions

Action: Share meeting invitation once sessions are confirmed.

Meeting closed: 7.46pm