

New England REZ Community Reference Group

Meeting 4

September 2025

EnergyCo

The Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo)



Acknowledgment of Country



Energy Corporation of New South Wales acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past and present through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Agenda



Item	Responsible
Acknowledgement of Country	Margaret Harvie
Welcome, housekeeping and apologies	Margaret Harvie
Pecuniary interests	Margaret Harvie
Noting of actions	Margaret Harvie
Meeting process	Margaret Harvie
The Environmental Impact Statement	Phil Jones
EIS Key Studies Update	Amanda Antcliff
Break	All
The Social Impact Assessment	Jessica Anagnostaras
REZ First Nations Engagement	Leanne Thompson
General business	All
Next meetings	All

Noting of actions

Overview

- ✓ An action register is provided with each meeting agenda to support accountability and transparency.
- ✓ The aim is to close out all actions by the following meeting, where possible.
- ✓ Actions will be delivered by the following meeting unless assigned a timeframe for delivery based on feedback from CRG members.

Maintaining an open and trusting environment is our priority, and we'll continue to provide thorough meeting notes to ensure transparency.

Uralla business area

1

Meeting procedures

Questions Register process and purpose



- Introduced for the New England REZ CRGs.
- Developed in response to member requests for clarity, transparency and timeliness in keeping track of questions and answers.
- Includes questions asked of EnergyCo during meetings or in writing between meetings. Questions can be submitted at any time.
- An updated document will be distributed a week ahead of each meeting including all queries up until the week prior to the CRG session.
- An updated version of the Register will be distributed after each meeting.
- Intent remains to publish the latest version online.
- The Actions Register records key commitments made during meetings.

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The Environmental Impact Statement

Planning the REZ – Approval to build our energy future

Displaying the EIS for public comment and seeking planning approval for the network infrastructure project is a critical milestone in delivering the REZ.

Application and assessment process:

- **Planning approval pathway** – including environmental, social and economic assessment, lodgment and exhibition, and determination.
- **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** – including update on technical studies and key findings to date.
- **EIS engagement** – including opportunities for the community to contribute to the process and shape the outcomes.

Cattle grazing near Armidale

Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI)



Component		CSSI	Current RNI EIS	Future Applications
REZ Network Infrastructure (RNI) Transmission Lines	Stages 1 & 2	✓	✓	
	Stage 3	✓		✓
Energy Hubs and Switching Stations	Stages 1 & 2	✓	✓	
	Stage 3	✓		✓
Generator Connections		✓		✓
Ancillary Development (incl upgrades)	Existing electricity infrastructure	✓	✓	✓
	Roads and tracks - eg OSOM upgrades for RNI	✓	✓	✓
	Communications infrastructure	✓	✓	✓
	Temporary construction infrastructure – eg accommodation, compounds, laydown areas, concrete batch plants	✓	✓	✓

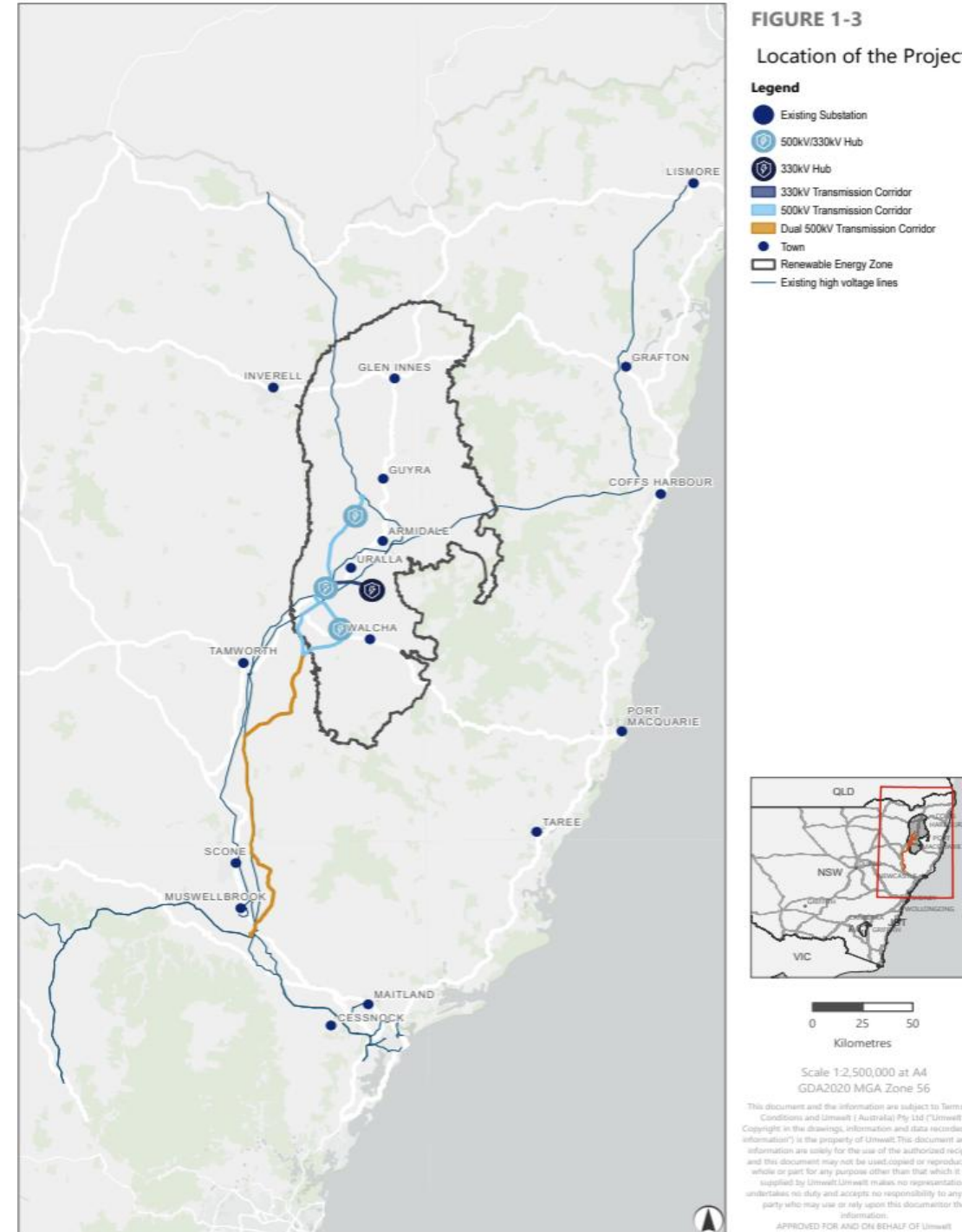
The New England REZ network infrastructure project was declared CSSI in July 2024.

- CSSI means the project is essential for economic, environmental or social reasons
- The declaration covers the REZ network infrastructure project (the current EIS), as well as future development
- CSSI projects are assessed and determined by the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
- CSSI projects must prepare and lodge a comprehensive EIS

New England REZ network infrastructure project

The project, as outlined in the scoping report, includes:

- new dual 500kV transmission lines between Bayswater Power Station and the REZ, and 330kV / 500kV lines to connect to proposed energy hubs within the REZ
- four energy hubs within the REZ
- ancillary development including:
 - new and / or upgraded access roads and public roads
 - upgrade or augmentation to existing electricity and utility infrastructure
 - other works including laydown areas, crushing and screening plants, concrete batch plants, stringing sites, helicopter landing pads, site offices and workforce accommodation



Planning pathway

The New England REZ network infrastructure project requires NSW and Commonwealth planning approvals including:

- NSW approval from the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act)
- Commonwealth approval from the Minister for the Environment and Water under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)
- Bilateral agreement between NSW and the Commonwealth
- *See provided document for detailed outline of the assessment process*



Key planning milestones



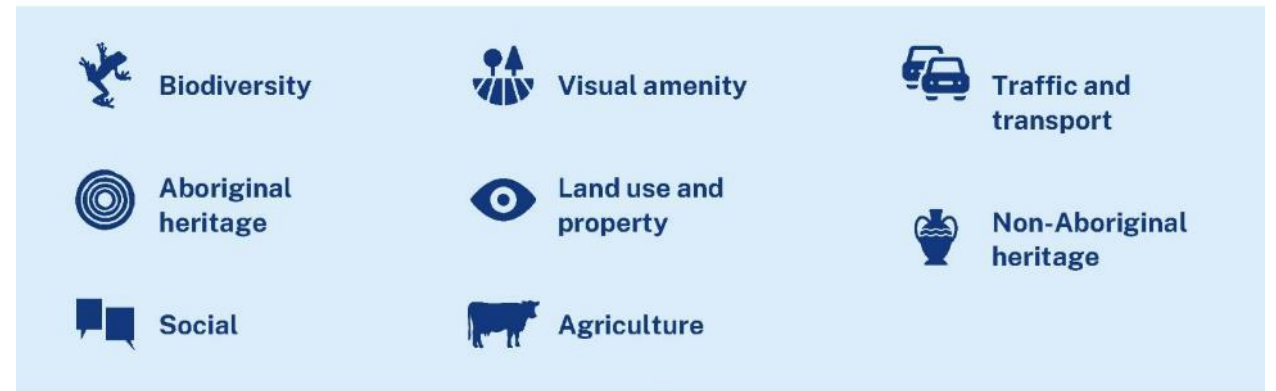
The Environmental Impact Statement

EnergyCo has been carrying out detailed environmental assessments since late 2023 to inform the EIS for the project.

The EIS will include:

- a description of the project and how it will be constructed
- technical assessments of potential environmental, social and economic impacts
- measures which would be implemented to **avoid, minimise and / or mitigate** potential environmental and social impacts during construction and operation of the project
- community and stakeholder consultation carried out to inform the project.

Key assessments



Supporting assessments





Heritage investigation in progress

EIS assessment methods

Study	Details
Assessment guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEARs and SSI Guidelines Prescribed methodologies, eg Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM), Noise Policy for Industry.
Desktop analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Databases, registers, aerial photography and remote sensing, previous studies, predictive modelling
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies, landowners, communities, First Nations and special interest groups Informs and guides impact assessment
Field studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where access available, field studies undertaken to verify and supplement assessment Current focus on biodiversity, heritage and visual
Impact assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results analysis, modelling and impact predictions, compliance assessment
Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration and description of proposed measures to avoid, mitigate or offset identified impacts

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EIS key studies update



Koala captured by motion cameras

Biodiversity

- Assessment in accordance with the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM).
- Starts with desktop analysis of existing databases and information.
- Detailed flora and fauna survey commenced in October 2023 with 83 weeks of field survey undertaken to date.
- Our ecologists have surveyed over 7,000 ha to date, with steep terrain up to 1,230 m in elevation within the survey area.
- >4,000 km of flora transects have been walked to date.

Biodiversity field survey



Thesium australe
(Austral toadflax)



Callistemon pungens
(planted)



Cymbidium canaliculatum
population in the Hunter
Catchment

*Some of the threatened
flora species confirmed to
date through field survey*

- Flora survey methods include:
 - vegetation mapping and floristic sampling
 - plots
 - transects
 - targeted seasonal threatened flora / fauna
- Vegetation surveys completed to date:
 - > 400 vegetation plots
 - > 300 rapid floristic sampling
 - > 4,000km flora transects
- ~ 20 Plant Community Types (PCTs) confirmed to date, some of which align to NSW and Commonwealth Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs) (eg White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland)
- Six threatened flora species confirmed to date

Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*)



Border thick-tailed Gecko (*Uvidicolus sphyurus*)



Diamond firetail (*Stagonopleura*)

Some of the threatened fauna species confirmed to date through field survey

Biodiversity field survey

- Fauna survey methods include:
 - Diurnal observation surveys - habitat assessments, bird surveys, reptile rock turning surveys
 - Nocturnal observation surveys - nocturnal spotlighting, call playback
 - Remote detection surveys - arboreal and terrestrial baited motion-triggered cameras, passive acoustic recording, thermal detection drones
- ~ 130 fauna species have been observed to date through field survey.
 - 21 of these are threatened species, including koala, squirrel glider, spotted-tailed quoll, Brush-tailed phascogale, Barking owl and Powerful owl.

Biodiversity field survey

▶ Drone-captured
footage



Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) (motion triggered camera)

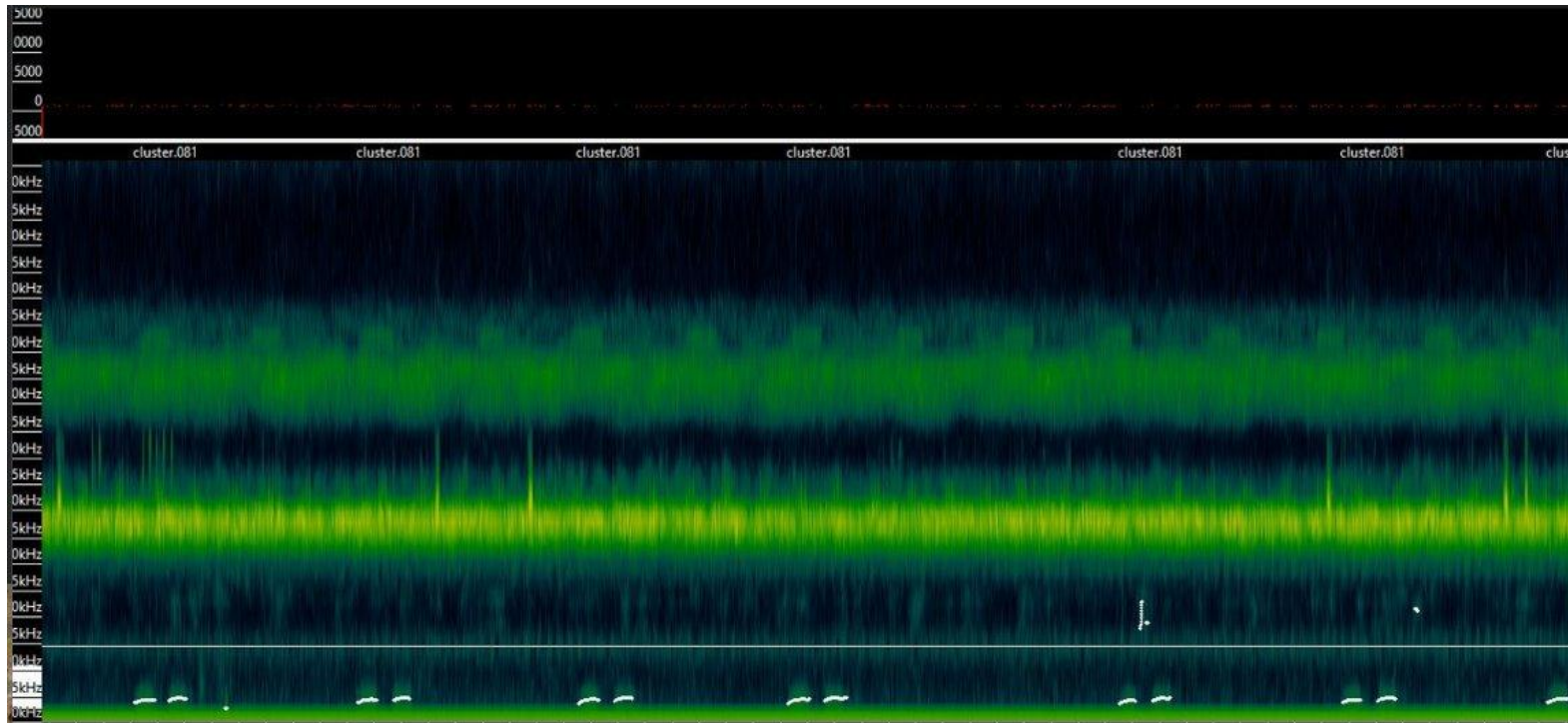


Brush-tailed phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*)
(motion triggered camera)



Spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) (motion triggered camera)

Biodiversity field survey



Spectrogram of a Powerful owl call recorded



Thermal drone survey
flight lines



Thermal drone
imagery – Koala
(*Phascolarctos
cinereus*)

Biodiversity field survey



Motion triggered camera observations – examples of other native and feral animals observed





Heritage investigations in progress

Aboriginal heritage

- We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Aboriginal people with connections to the project area in undertaking the assessment to date of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- The Preferred Study Corridor intersects with five Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs - Wanaruah, Nungaroo, Tamworth, Amaroo and Armidale). Several First Nations groups have connection to the region / areas the project traverses.
- Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment is being undertaken following the:
 - *Guide to Investigating, Assessing and Reporting on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in NSW* (OEH 2011)
 - *Code of Practice for the Archaeological Investigation of Aboriginal Objects in NSW* (DECEW NSW 2010)
- Aboriginal heritage consultation is being undertaken with regard to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Consultation requirements for Proponents (DECCW 2010).



Heritage investigations in progress

Aboriginal heritage

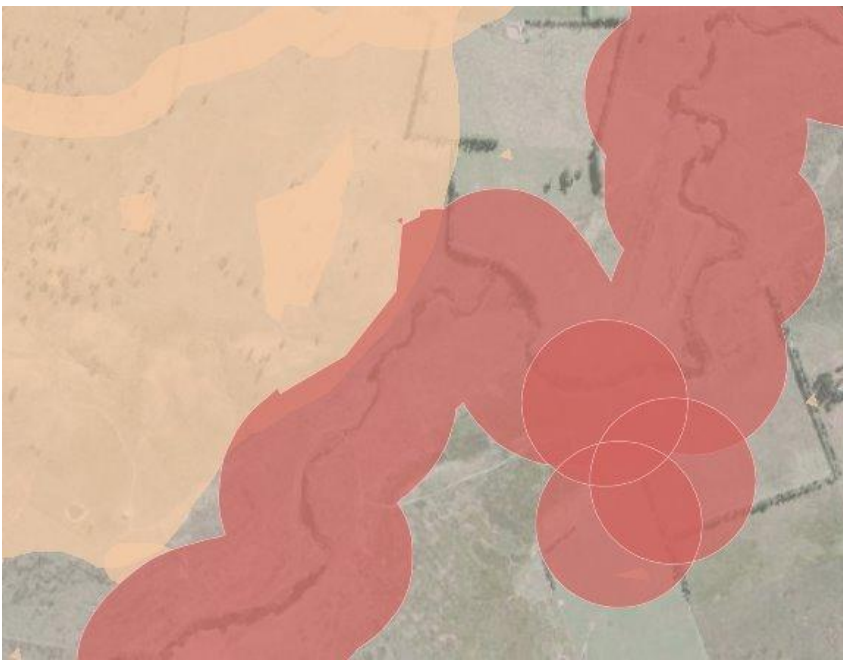
Assessment includes:

- Desktop analysis of existing databases and information
- Consultation with over 80 Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs)
- Preparation of a predictive model
- Field survey and test excavation including RAPs
- Cultural values assessment, which has included interviews with ~18 interviewees to date

Aboriginal heritage

Predictive modelling:

- is based on established landscape occupation models and context-specific environmental, archaeological, historical and cultural information
- can be used to estimate the nature and distribution of evidence of Aboriginal land use in a defined area, and to inform survey design
- The model has been used to identify landforms likely to have high, moderate, or low archaeological potential. This includes:
 - High potential landforms - known Aboriginal sites or cultural places, as well as those with a gentle gradient within 200m of a perennial waterway (ie river or creek that normally denotes at least semi-permanent water).
 - Moderate potential landforms - a range of types including those with a gentle gradient within 100m of a non-perennial (normally meaning a highly ephemeral source water), as well as major ridge lines and areas with scarps.



Aboriginal heritage survey



Field survey:

- Heritage team has surveyed over 7,000 hectares in three stages of fieldwork, totalling 18 weeks of survey to date.
- ~1,200km walked to date
- ~220 Aboriginal heritage sites identified to date - artefact scatters, isolated artefacts, modified trees / potential modified trees, potential archaeological deposits (PADS)
- 5 weeks of Aboriginal heritage test excavation completed to date involving 215 test pits – testing subsurface archaeological potential
- Aboriginal community members involved in survey, test excavation and cultural values interviews.



Non-Aboriginal heritage

- Non-Aboriginal heritage assessment undertaken with regard to Guidelines for Preparing a Statement of Heritage Impact (DPE 2023)
- Starts with desktop analysis of existing databases and information
- Field survey - 18 weeks of survey completed to date, with over 7,000 ha covered
- Non-Aboriginal heritage survey has identified various items of interest, including potential structure sites (residential or agricultural) and agricultural items.



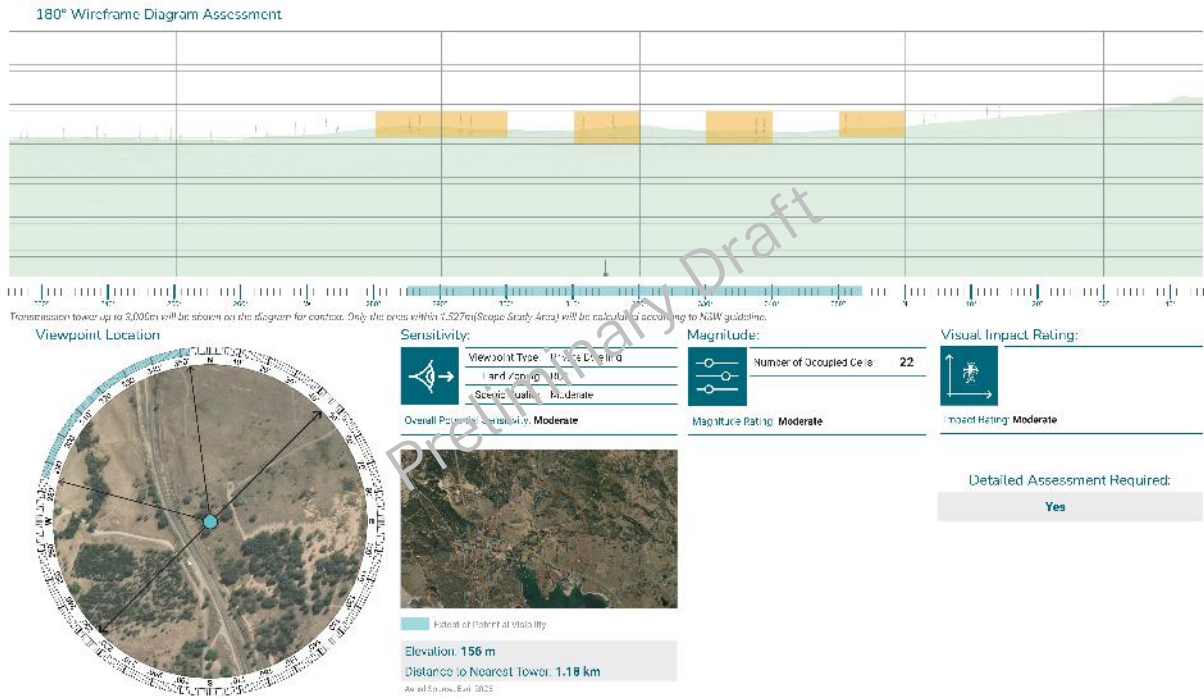


Countryside near Tamworth

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- Guided by *Transmission Guideline Technical Supplement for Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment (2024)*
- Assessment includes:
 - Landscape character assessment – assessment of potential impact on built / natural / cultural character or sense of place
 - Visual impact assessment – assessment of potential impact on views including public / private, considering sensitivity of a view to change / magnitude of proposal.
 - Based on a tower height of 80m, the visual study area is ~1.5 km from the corridor (as defined in the guideline).
 - Commenced analysis of visibility from private dwellings (non-easement affected) in the visual study area.
 - Commenced fieldwork including photography from dwellings and production of photomontages which give an indication of the views to the project.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment





How will the project look against the landscape?

- The project is modelling the alignment and energy hubs as part of the landscape into a 3D visualisations tool
- This tool will enable stakeholders and the community to review the infrastructure throughout the landscape

Learnings from the Central West-Orana REZ



Project vehicle in paddock near Armidale

Completion of 'REZ-wide studies' at an early stage of development

- Provides for better and earlier coordination around cumulative issues

Strategic approach to biodiversity offsets.

- SODA = Strategic Offset Delivery Agreement, managed by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

EnergyCo



Place Manager at Tamworth 'pop up' session

Cumulative impacts



- The EIS will consider cumulative impacts in accordance with the requirements of the *Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Projects* (2022).
- The EIS cumulative impact assessment will consider the outcomes of the NE REZ wide studies that EnergyCo is currently undertaking. These include:
 - workforce accommodation
 - social infrastructure
 - skills and training
 - local supply chain
 - waste management
 - water supply



Information stand in Tamworth

The EIS – Have your say!



Once complete, the EIS and planning application will be lodged with DPHI for public exhibition and assessment.

- DPHI will first check that the SEARs and other relevant requirements have been met.
- Once confirmed, DPHI will place the EIS on public exhibition for comment.

The public exhibition

- There is a minimum 28-day public exhibition period.
- All documentation will be accessible on the DPHI Major Projects website.
- Anyone with an interest in the project will be able to make a written submission via the website, email or post.

Responding to submissions

- Following exhibition, DPHI will collate the submissions and require EnergyCo to prepare a detailed Submissions Report, providing a response to the issues raised.

Community engagement – public exhibition

We'll be undertaking a full program of engagement with communities and stakeholders to raise awareness about the exhibition, help people to navigate the application and EIS, and understand how to make a submission.



Direct meetings / discussions with landowners and other stakeholders

Project website / social media



'Pop up' information stands

Community information sessions



Briefings and presentations with key stakeholder groups including the CRGs

Project Updates and newsletters



Our Project hotline and email inbox will continue to be available throughout the exhibition period.

 **1800 118 894** (9am-5pm Mon-Fri)



nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au

Break

4

The Social Impact Assessment

The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) – Purpose and Scope



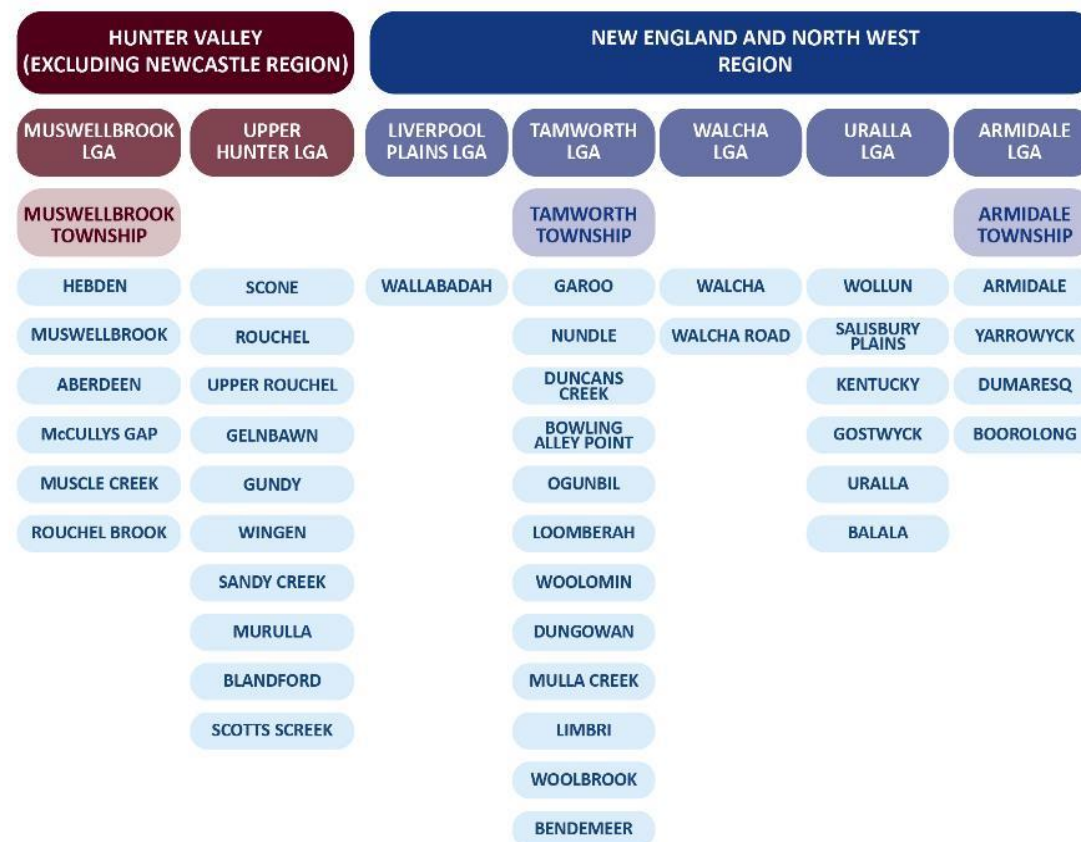
- Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is a process used to identify, predict and evaluate the likely social impacts of a project. It also proposes responses that aim to avoid, mitigate or reduce negative impacts and enhance positive impacts.
- ‘Social impacts’ generally refer to the consequences that people experience when a new project brings change. For the purposes of SIA, ‘people’ includes individuals, households, groups, communities or organisations.
- The SIA scope is to assess impacts of the Network Infrastructure Project.

Process



SIA Study Area

- Landholders and residents situated on or intersecting with the project corridor
- Suburbs / small rural localities that the project and ancillary infrastructure traverses
- Residents of the broader LGAs in which the project is located
- Service providers and local businesses in the community service hubs of Muswellbrook, Tamworth and Armidale likely to service the construction and operation of the project
- Residents of the regions of the Hunter and the New England and Northwest, given the project traverses through both
- Groups that may be more vulnerable to change
- Transport routes / access to and from the project corridor
- Natural and built features of importance to community members within and near the corridor



Approach and methodology



Scoping

- Determine social locality
- Review of policy and community context
- Initial community and stakeholder consultation
- Preliminary assessment of issues, impacts and opportunities



Baseline

- Develop social baseline considering political, cultural, natural, human, economic and social capital factors
- Consider level of adaptive capacity to change (vulnerability/resilience analysis)



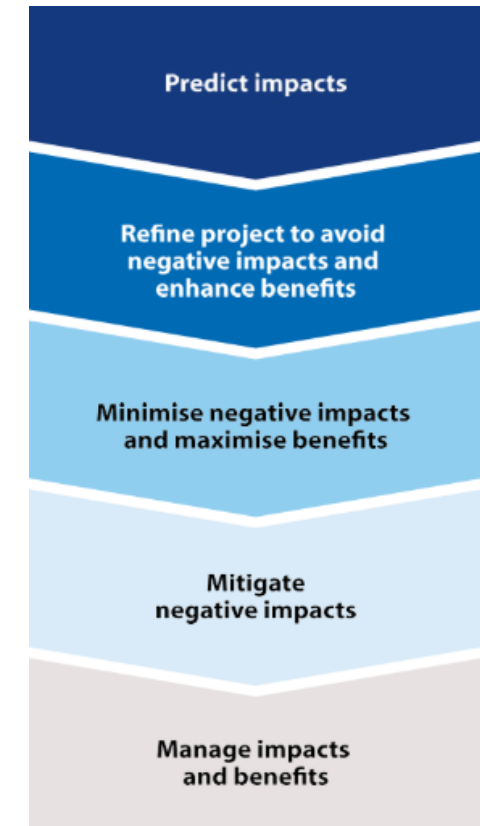
Impact Prediction and Assessment

- Develop SIA Consultation Plan
- Undertake community and stakeholder consultation to inform impact identification and project refinements
- Review findings from other technical studies that relate to impacts upon people
- Technical significance evaluation
- Develop mitigation and enhancement measures including community-identified mitigation and potential project changes



Impact Management

- Social Impact Management Framework and/or Plan may be required to be developed following the Project's assessment by NSW DPHI
- Involvement of community and key stakeholders in SIMP development and ongoing implementation of commitments or actions
- Would involve monitoring and review mechanisms



Source: NSW DPHI SIA Guideline (2025)

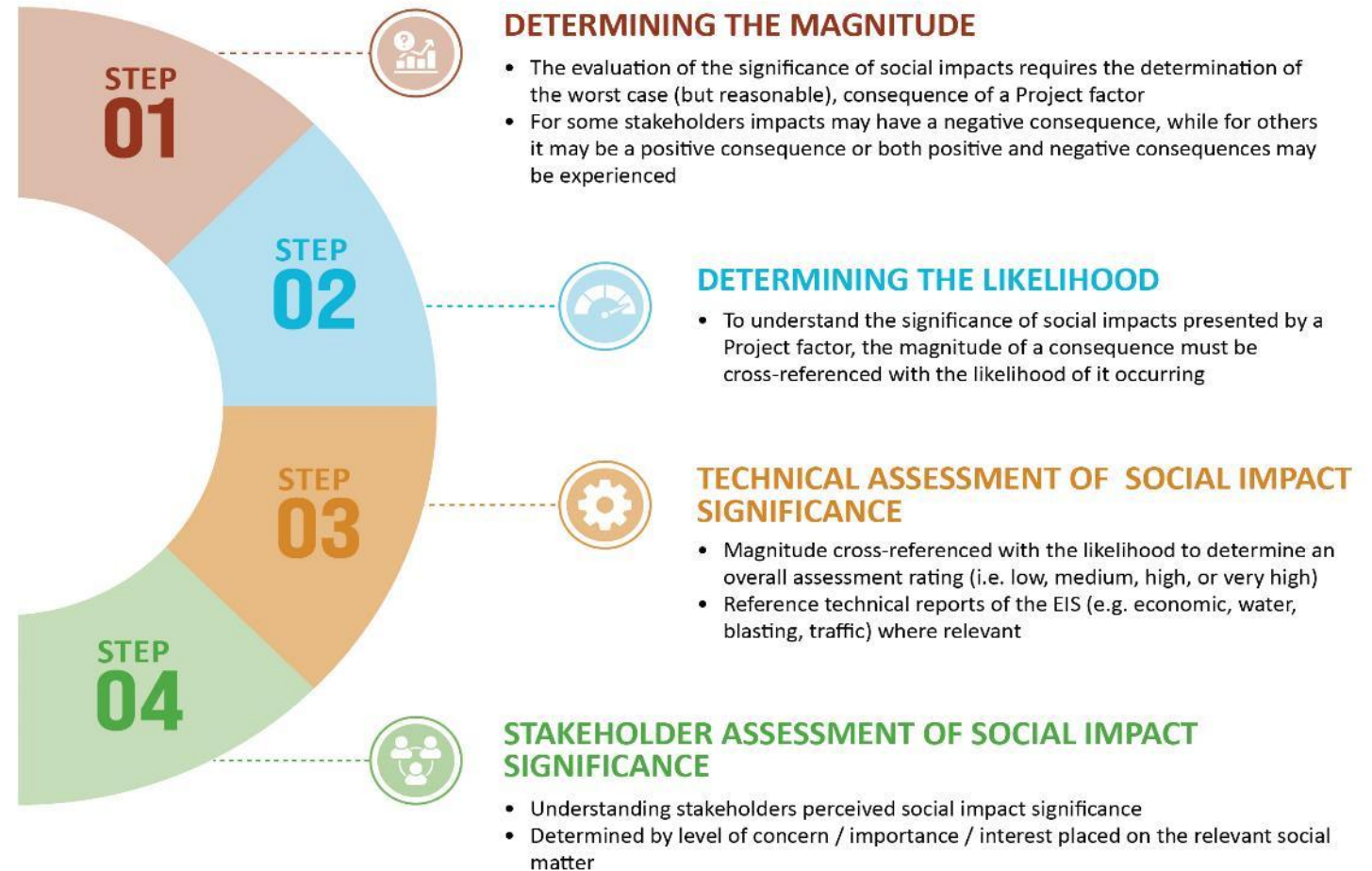
SIA Consultation

- SIA team is working collaboratively with EnergyCo alongside the project's broader engagement program and maximising opportunities across different stakeholder groups – program still underway
- High level of collaboration with Place Managers
- In person/online/telephone interviews and workshops undertaken with a range of stakeholder groups
- Online community survey distributed to EnergyCo's online mailing list and via post to ~46,000 properties; and through local networks and contacts.
- Umwelt social team members have been involved in broader project community engagement activities including community information sessions and briefings



Social Impact Evaluation – determining significance

- Significance rating informed by understanding of:
 - Social baseline – relevance to the social locality
 - Engagement outcomes analysis
 - Previous SIA studies and social research of relevance to the current context
 - Outcomes of other technical studies



Social Impact Evaluation – determining significance

	1	2	3	4	5
LIKELIHOOD LEVEL	MINIMAL	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR	TRANSFORMATIONAL
A Almost certain	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Very high
B Likely	Low	Medium	High	High	Very high
C Possible	Low	Low	Medium	High	High
D Unlikely	Negligible	Low	Low	Medium	High
E Very unlikely	Negligible	Negligible	Low	Medium	Medium

Community Engagement to inform SIA (to date)



Mechanism	Detail	Scope	Phase
Key Informant / Key Stakeholder Interviews	7 Councils	SIA specific	EIS
	9 Service Providers (mental health, health, police, education and employment)	SIA specific	EIS
	6 Community and Special Interest groups	SIA specific	EIS
Community and Landowner Survey	532 responses	SIA specific	EIS
Community Feedback Forms	170+ feedback forms submitted by community members at events	Project-wide	Scoping and EIS
Community Information Sessions	Members of the SIA team attended 18 community sessions	Project-wide	Scoping
Secondary Data Review	Review of data outcomes of engagement undertaken by the Project and other technical teams including from Place Manager activities (landowner meetings) since commencement of the Project	Project-wide	Scoping and EIS

Scoping Report Engagement Summary

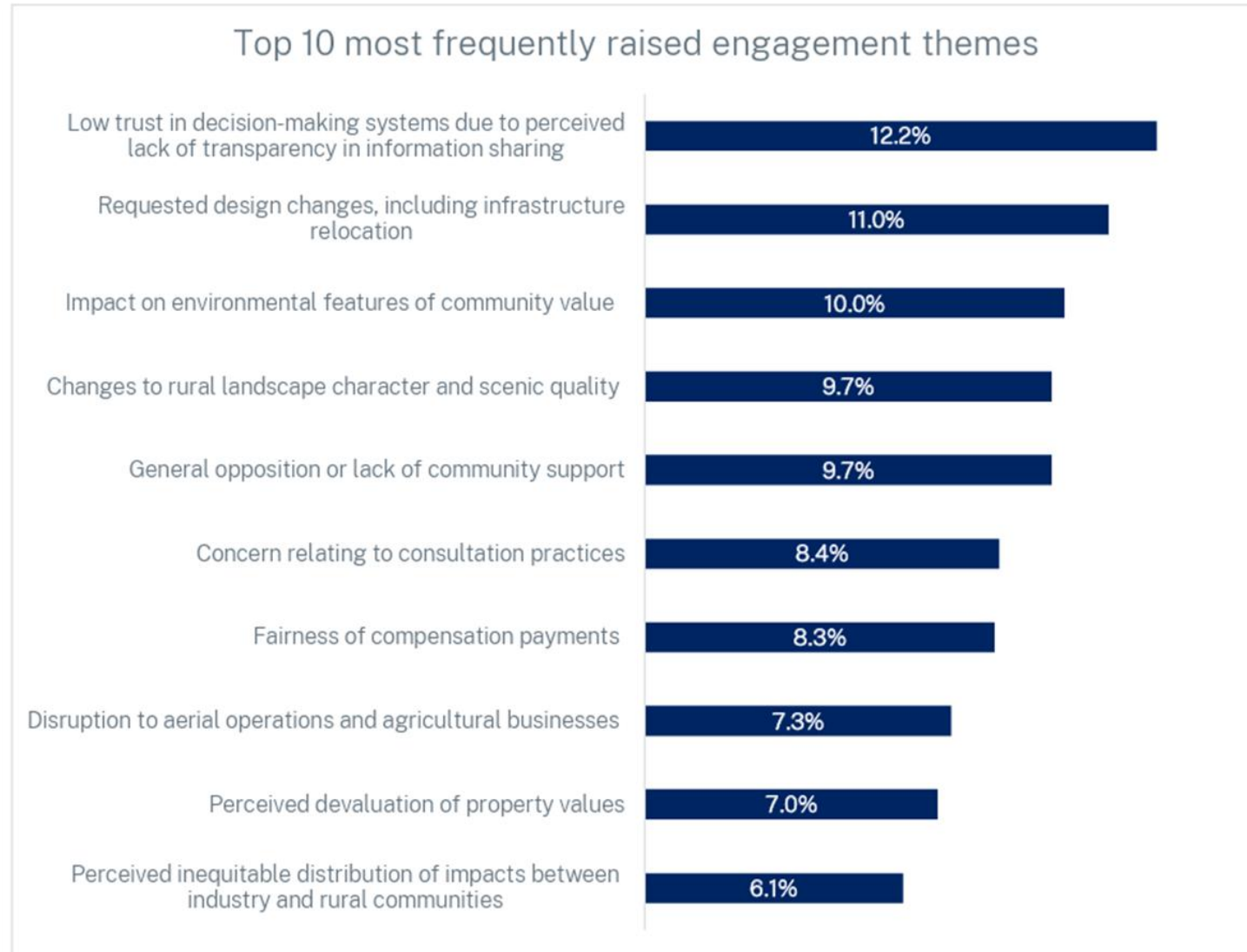


Figure 3-2 Top 10 Engagement Themes Raised

Source: Umwelt, 2024.

Community Survey – Approach

- As part of SIA specific engagement, Umwelt prepared and delivered a community and landowner survey.
- The survey was distributed via the EnergyCo mailing list, was included in the March 2025 Project update, and provided directly to community groups for distribution.
- The survey received a total of 532 responses.
- Due to the nature of the distribution method, the survey results are not a representative sample as participation was voluntary and opt in.
- The survey included a range of question types, including multiple choice, rank, and open text boxes. Effort was made to ensure that there was opportunity for community members to express themselves in their own words within the survey.
- The survey was live from the 28th of April through to 4th of July (approx 10 weeks)



Walcha township

Next steps

1. First Nations consultation to inform SIA from a Traditional Owner and First Nations community perspective
2. Further consultation with interested or affected people/groups to ensure opportunity for participation and input and to inform design of mitigations and management measures
3. Continued coordination with REZ-wide studies in considering cumulative social matters.
4. SIA Report to be prepared documenting process and outcomes, as part of EIS.
5. SIA to be publicly exhibited as part of EIS.
6. Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) may be required following project approval.

5

REZ-First Nations engagement

First Nations engagement



- ✓ NSWALC briefing (Tamworth) – early Aug.
- ✓ The Gathering: Empowering Aboriginal Futures in Renewable Energy (Dubbo) - Sep.
- ✓ Tamworth face-to-face briefing to be scheduled, invitations to be issued soon.
- ✓ SIA interviews scheduled for mid Nov.

6

General business

Social Outcomes Reference Group nominations



- EnergyCo is undertaking a **Social Risk and Opportunity Analysis** for all REZs.
- Objective to understand, predict and manage intended / unintended social consequences and maximise social benefit opportunities in delivering projects.
- **Astrolabe Group** engaged to conduct the analysis.
- Two nominations requested from this group to represent New England REZ CRGs by Thursday 25 September.
- Nominations will join a state-wide reference group to help co-design the scope of the analysis and identify objectives and outcomes.
- More information and registration of interest: hccregionalcoord@energyco.nsw.gov.au.

Next meeting

- ✓ Meeting 5: Week commencing 24 November
- ✓ Meeting 6: Week commencing 23 February 2026