

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Community Reference Group (CRG) North - Meeting 4

Date: Wednesday 24 September 2025 – 11.30am-2.48pm

Location: Uralla Old Court House, 9 Hill Street, Uralla

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

Attended

Chairperson	Margaret Harvie
Community Representatives	Alex Hunter Annette Kilarr Bruce McMullen James Reilly Voice for Walcha – Michael Luchich
LALC Representatives	Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council – Lakeisha Hile
LGA delegates	Armidale Regional Council – Stephen Wood, Senior Strategic Planner Tamworth Regional Council – Mayor Russell Webb Uralla Shire Council – Councillor Sarah Burrows
EnergyCo Representatives	Julian Watson, New England REZ Deputy Project Director (part of meeting) Phil Jones, New England REZ Planning and Environment Lead (part of meeting) Amanda Antcliff, Umwelt Senior Principal Environmental Planner Jess Anagnostaras, Umwelt Manager Social & Community Practice Melissa Maurer, New England REZ Community Engagement Manager Leanne Thompson, New England REZ Senior First Nations Advisor
Note taker	Kate McGrath
*Online attendance	

Apologies

Tony Lashlie

Walcha Council - Councillor Rachael Greig

Inverell Shire Council – Mayor Kate Dight

Diane Gray

Declarations of interest

Member	Details
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Kate Dight	Non-pecuniary interest. Personal relationship with project developer.
Sarah Burrows	Pecuniary interest. Landholder of property in proposed 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	Non-pecuniary interest. Margaret 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

- Meeting opened 11.33am.
- 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.
- Introductions around the room.
- Chair noted Julian Watson and Phil Jones would be late arrivals due to a delayed flight.

Item 2. Welcome and housekeeping and apologies

- Chair welcomed members and outlined structure of meeting.
- Chair acknowledged meetings routinely run longer, and online sessions have been introduced to create an additional forum to deep dive into important matters for the CRG.

Item 3. Noting of actions

#	Action	Responsible	Status
1	Provide link to Central West-Orana Conservation Investment Strategy once published.	Darren Clarke	Complete. Please follow this link - Central West-Orana Conservation Investment Strategy .

#	Action	Responsible	Status
2	Provide link to credit list of species if available.	Laura Hoffman	Biodiversity credits are the standard used to measure environmental impacts under the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme. There are two types of credits: Ecosystem credits – for impacts on native vegetation and threatened ecological communities, such as New England Hills Stringybark-Box Woodland and White Box–Yellow Box–Blakely’s Red Gum Grassy Woodland. Species credits – for impacts on individual threatened species that cannot be reliably predicted from vegetation alone, such as Bluegrass (<i>Dicanthium setosum</i>). A biodiversity assessment identifies the type and number of credits required to offset project impacts. These credits are then purchased and retired through the biodiversity credit market. A list of available biodiversity credits (both ecosystem and species) can be accessed via the NSW Biodiversity Credits Market.
3	Clarify process for publishing and publicly sharing presentations	Melissa Maurer	Complete. All CRG presentations to be shared on EnergyCo’s website.
4	Creation of register of questions asked by members between meetings	Melissa Maurer	Commenced. CRG members can continue to submit questions for the Questions Register via the CRG Chair. When submitting a question, please make it clear that it is intended for inclusion in the Questions Register. <i>Please note that questions may be paraphrased or reworded to improve clarity, ensure they are easily understood, and avoid duplication. Some questions may be submitted by multiple members or include nuances that are grouped and rephrased to reflect common themes.</i>

#	Action	Responsible	Status
5	If information is available, EnergyCo will provide rate of build for approved, commissioned, under construction and rate completed in NSW for 2024	Julian Watson	EnergyCo is responsible for planning and coordinating transmission infrastructure for the NSW Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), such as the New England REZ. EnergyCo does not have oversight of all transmission projects across the state. Projects outside of those related to the REZs, or those being delivered by other proponents, are the responsibility of different organisations. For broader information on approved, commissioned, under-construction and completed transmission projects across NSW, please refer to: • AEMO's Integrated System Plan (ISP), which outlines committed and anticipated transmission projects across the National Electricity Market. • Transgrid's Transmission Annual Planning Report (TAPR), which provides progress updates on major NSW transmission projects. EnergyCo have sought further details from other organisations and will provide an update when further information is provided.
6	Need to have deeper discussion about workforce accommodation	Chairperson	To be included in a future CRG meeting or dedicated online session.
7	EnergyCo to investigate developing a post-event summary to meet landholders' biosecurity needs.	Julian Watson	Considering the development of a post-event summary that would provide landholders with a record of site visits, including who attended, when, and any relevant biosecurity measures undertaken. Update to be provided once options have been explored.
8	Community Employment Benefit Program targeted session will be delivered later in the year.	Julian Watson	To be added to the agenda for future CRG meeting.

Item 4. Meeting process

- Chair noted the Action Register is a record of actions that have been generated from the meetings and does not include the Questions that are on the Question Register.
- Question Register includes questions posed outside of meetings and in online sessions.

- Question Register is routinely updated with responses and may be paraphrased and/or combined when there are similar questions received.
- Question Register is a record of all questions and answers, and the plan is to have this published online and updated regularly.
- Comment from CRG member that cumulative impact study was not captured on agenda.
- Comment from CRG member regarding Renew Economy article and confusion regarding which information has been provided to whom.

EnergyCo response: EnergyCo indicated they responded to a media enquiry and a copy of the response had been emailed to CRG members in the response to Rachel Grieg's question on this matter. Council staff have been briefed on studies, but they yet to be publicly released, and stakeholder feedback will be invited.

- Comment from CRG member about the five current cumulative impact studies provided to Councils being locked down, accessible only by code, and cannot be copied. Comment that it feels suspicious when these documents that are intended for the public are so locked down at this stage. Asked if it means the studies will change. Question taken on notice.

Action: Provide more information about access to REZ wide studies and report if changes are made based on council feedback.

- Comment from CRG members as follows:
 - that key topics from the study will require further discussion.
 - The current process does not encourage good communication.
 - that EIS is published too late for input - input to the EIS should happen earlier before publication.
 - that ability to respond to the EIS after publication is limited – due to timing and the size of the document.
 - that cumulative impact studies should have happened earlier.
- Chair clarified that the REZ wide cumulative impact studies are separate from the EIS cumulative impact study/ chapter.
- Comment from CRG member that fair balanced feedback on these studies is required and CRG members should be given a copy to help distil public sentiment. A covert approach to distributing information is not going to attract fair comment and only very interested people can help shape the decisions.

Item 5. Environmental impact statement overview

- Presented by Amanda Antcliff, Umwelt Senior Principal Environmental Planner.
- Project has been declared critical state significant infrastructure (CSSI).
- Table presented to indicate what the declaration covers.

- Project approval is only for the project itself; other areas covered in declaration are subject to a separate approval.
- As CSSI, approval is needed under NSW Planning legislation and Commonwealth planning process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*.
- Project needs approval from State and Commonwealth Ministers in separate processes.
- Bilateral agreement means single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is considered at both levels for approval.
- Project milestones discussed as follows:
 - Scoping report creates the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) which stipulates what EIS must cover.
 - SEARs issued late last year.
 - EIS currently being prepared.
 - Key studies with longer lead time discussed.
 - EIS subject to public exhibition once lodged.
 - Exhibition period closes and EnergyCo must review and respond to all submissions, including those from government agencies and regulators.
 - Application is determined at state level and then at Commonwealth level.
- EIS considers what SEARs requires and defines project, including technical assessments which are appended to the EIS.
- Biodiversity assessment must be in accordance with Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) as required under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- Guidelines define assessment process for each assessment.
- All assessments begin with desktop analysis of existing data.
- Engagement processes feed into each study and then into EIS.
- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage has specific engagement requirements.
- Several of the studies require detailed assessment in the field, such as biodiversity and cultural.
- Each assessment goes into the EIS and are conducted in accordance with guidelines and makes recommendations for management and mitigation.
- Management and mitigation require EIS to include complete summary of all mitigation measures that apply to the project, which will be in an appendix.
- CRG member requested update on EIS timeline.

EnergyCo response: EnergyCo will provide this information when available.

Action: Provide EIS timeline to CRG.

- Break for group photo - Comment that photo was a good idea and could be used for press release to provide update. Presentation about the EIS studies continued after the photo break.
- Biodiversity assessment starts with desktop analysis.
- Flora and fauna field surveys have commenced with over 7000 hectares completed, with teams walking over 4000km of flora transects and more to be done.
- Field survey broken down into flora and fauna.
- Flora survey includes methods such as vegetation mapping, which underpins the entire assessment, identifying plant community types indicates likely fauna species in the habitat.
- Floristic sampling, plots of detailed species in specific area/ plant community types.
- Regulator has statewide vegetation mapping to use as baseline and then field sampling verifies or refines baseline data.
- BAM defines how many plots need to be completed.
- End outcome is a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) which much be signed off by accredited assessor.
- Team of ecologists are accredited assessors; project manager will sign off.
- Targeted seasonal survey for threatened flora and fauna commenced October 2023.
- 300 rapid floristic sampling completed.
- Plant community types are used to look at how they align with listed threatened ecological communities at state and commonwealth level.
- 6 communities have been identified as threatened ecological communities, such as box gum.
- Confirmation of 6 threatened flora species in the alignment.
- One threatened ecological community is the tiger orchid.
- Umwelt will complete the BDAR.
- CRG member asked how all the flora and fauna survey information relates to DCCEE's offsets program and recent changes to that process?

Response: EIS informs offsets and BDAR will identify what the offset obligation is for the species credits.

- EnergyCo will need to determine how offset obligations are met.
- Comment from CRG member asking if BDARs are public?

Response: Yes.

- Comment from CRG member asking if landholders are told what flora and fauna is specifically on their property?

Response: This information may be provided on request.

- Comment that flora and fauna information has been requested and not received.

Action: Confirm that information about flora and fauna surveys is provided to landholder on request and ensure landholders can receive information about flora and fauna on their property.

- CRG member asked if DCCEE determine if project is a controlled action, and if that is informed by surveys and BDAR?

Response: The need for Commonwealth approval is based on whether the project is likely to have an impact on matters of national environmental significance. If the project is deemed a controlled action, Commonwealth approval is required, and supplementary SEARs are issued to address Commonwealth matters.

- CRG member asked if Umwelt use local ecologists to do this work?

Response: Most of the Umwelt team is based in Newcastle and sub-consultants have been engaged, however we cannot confirm if they are local. We can confirm there have been meetings with a group of local people with interest in biodiversity and Umwelt ecology team have met to discuss key areas of interest. Question relating to field work taken on notice.

Action: Provide information regarding the engagement of local ecologists.

- Comment from CRG member that a koala ecologist has been tracking koalas in the district for many years and there may be duplication.
- There is a verification process of the field data, and the verification methods may be conducted remotely.
- Threatened species records are added to government databases and made publicly available.
- CRG member asked if there have been any new species identified?

Response: No new species have been identified to date.

- Fauna survey methods include daytime observation surveys, habitats, bird and reptile surveys, spotlighting and call playbacks of owls and nocturnal animals, remote detection surveys.
- 130 fauna species identified and 21 are listed as threatened including koala and squirrel glider.
- Motion triggered cameras capture fauna, positioned for about 4 weeks and images reviewed.
- Spectrogram of Powerful Owl call presented.
- Drone captured footage is captured in vegetated areas within survey area with a focus on koalas, aiming to capture fauna residing in trees.
- Drone operators remain in line of sight of drone with 500m maximum from where operator is standing.
- Video of drone footage shared.
- CRG member asked how wide the survey corridor is?

Response: It is typically 250m wide.

- Spotted tail quoll observed in spotlighting survey (video shown).

- CRG member asked what distance drones maintain from fauna to avoid noise disturbance and how this distance is determined. Question taken on notice.

Action: Provide information about required drone distance to mitigate noise disturbance.

- Comment that there would be legislation to guide this - even farm stock must be a certain distance from a drone.
- Feral animals were also picked up as part of the surveys.
- CRG member asked what is done with feral animal data?

Response: Information is provided to landowners on request.

- CRG member asked if feral animals are captured/documented in surveys. Question taken on notice.

Action: Confirm if feral animals are included in fauna surveys.

- CRG member asked about access to private land for field survey?

Response: Field surveys cannot be undertaken without the landowner's approval. Where access is not granted, data is instead drawn from mapping and nearby surveys. In cases where a property has not been surveyed, the presence of biodiversity values is assumed, which results in a higher offset liability. This liability can be reduced post-approval if a survey is conducted to confirm a lower level of impact.

- Significant contribution from Aboriginal people in assessment.
- Study corridor intersects with five LALCs and several first nations groups.
- Cultural assessments and archaeological investigation guided by guidelines.
- Clearly defined process that starts right at the beginning with stakeholder consultation and seeking people to become a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) to the project - who review the methodology and survey.
- Defined process which must be adhered to for duration of assessment.
- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report is reviewed and commented on by RAPs prior to inclusion in EIS, occurs part way through this project.
- Desktop analysis prior to field studies using data from Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS).
- Archaeologists prepare predictive models and then test excavation for identified areas for field surveys to identify sub surface deposits and complete cultural values assessment.
- Discussion with First Nations people to identify cultural value of the landscape, including 18 interviews across the alignment.
- Predictive model is a desktop-based assessment, a GIS spatial analysis based on occupation models of historical use and considers landform and recorded data.
- Predictive model used to identify likely areas of use, not just known areas of occupation.

- 200m from each known site as a buffer, waterways and gradient of land will map likely historical usage.
- Different landforms likely to have different traditional usage and occupation.
- High potential landforms inform survey design, low potential still surveyed but less thoroughly.
- If outcomes of survey confirm the predictive model it proceeds, if not, then it is refined based on new data.
- Model is built based on consultation and key inputs are provided to RAPs and documented, with feedback and input to close the loop.
- Field survey has been completed on over 7000 hectares.
- Umwelt team focused on New England and OzArk Environment & Heritage have surveyed from Bayswater.
- Team has walked more than 1200km to date.
- Each field day includes minimum of 2 archaeologists and 4 RAPs.
- CRG member asked how the information is recorded when a site is identified.

Response: It is recorded in the AHIMS system and is reviewed by the RAPs.

- RAPs involved in management of sites, such as determining how to manage the presence of scar trees.
- CRG member asked if no response is taken as silent approval, or if explicit permission is required.
Question taken on notice.

Action: Provide information about level of approval required from RAPs.

- If RAP wants to be involved then invitations to have them participate continue, invitation is recorded, evidence is gathered to demonstrate the attempts to engage. Emphasis is on trying, it is understood that lack of participation isn't always lack of interest and Aboriginal participation helps to foster engagement and build relationship.
- CRG member commented that the role of First Nations engagement is to help and support the process.

EnergyCo response: While engagement and heritage are managed by separate teams, EnergyCo recognises the importance of building more direct communication within communities, as emails may sometimes be missed and competing events can affect RAP participation.

- Report has a consultation log as a requirement for the regulator with registration of every attempt to engage and all interactions.
- To date around 220 sites have been identified with modified trees, artefacts and potential subsurface artefacts.
- Potential archaeological deposits (PADs) are areas that may have artefacts, team digs in defined area for test pitting.
- Dig and sieve to determine deposits, 215 test pits have been completed and this will continue.

- Aboriginal community members have been involved in all digs to date.
- Non-Aboriginal heritage survey is concurrent with Aboriginal assessment in accordance with guidelines.
- Starts with desktop analysis and then field recordings.
- Survey markers and structural remains have been discovered.
- Corridor includes one heritage listing; Saumarez Homestead near Armidale.
- The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is in its early stages and follows new guidelines outlined in the *Technical Supplement for Transmission Projects*.
- The assessment includes two key components: a landscape character assessment and a visual impact assessment.
- The visual impact assessment considers both the sensitivity of a view and the magnitude of the proposed change.
- Assessment assumptions are intentionally conservative, based on a maximum tower height of 80 metres (although the actual maximum height is likely to be around 74 metres).
- The visual study area is determined by tower height — for an 80-metre structure, this equates to approximately 1.5 kilometres from the edge of the corridor.
- The assessment of dwelling locations considers the terrain and whether a tower would be visible from each dwelling. Further analysis is then undertaken using terrain data and elevation profiles to build a wireframe model, which identifies where towers may be visible within the view and assesses the magnitude of that visibility. This modelling is conducted without accounting for existing or future mitigation measures or vegetation.
- Assessments are completed at properties with landowner permission to create photo montage, including model.
- Example shown of computer-based model and image montage to give indication of visual impact.
- CRG member noted that tower placement and transmission lines aren't finalised, so how can this be assessed.

EnergyCo response: Assumptions of 80m towers allows for conservative assessment and assumed tower locations are every 100m for purpose of assessment to build a conservative model. However the towers will likely be 400-600m apart, depending on the topology and terrain.

- CRG member asked if dual 500kv lines between hubs is planned?

EnergyCo response: It depends on the hub. Dual lines are currently proposed from Bayswater to REZ. Interactive maps show locations of lines and how many. More detail to be provided.

Action: Provide information about location of dual transmission lines.

- Moir Studio landscape architects are engaged to do the visual assessment work.
- Comment from CRG member requesting they be instructed not to take photos with a tree in front.

EnergyCo response: Moir are required to consider the primary viewpoint as the key risk and there are guidelines they follow.

- CRG member noted there have been issues with a different project.
- CRG member asked how the primary viewpoint is determined?

EnergyCo response: It is defined in the guidelines.

- EnergyCo is looking at building 3D visualisation tools to plot towers and give indication of visual amenity.
- EIS will have an assessment of cumulative impacts and this will also draw on outcomes of REZ wide studies when they are available.
- Chair called for questions and comments in relation to the EIS and studies – with around the room opportunity for each member.
- CRG member asked when the biodiversity field studies will be completed.

EnergyCo response: The BDAR that follows the studies will be attached to the EIS and field studies will continue until finalised.

- CRG member asked about public exhibition process and exhibition duration. Also noted that 28 days is not enough time.
- Comment that EIS is hard to read and requires time.

EnergyCo response: The Department of Planning Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) will check it meets requirements and then place on public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days. Response that it is the legislated minimum but also that exhibitions have been extended in the past.

A range of activities will occur during public exhibition period including emails, pop ups, briefings and presentations. Engagement has been ongoing since June 2022 and has helped shape the project to its current point and alignment will be refined for Chaffey and Glenbawn dams based on feedback.

- CRG member indicated that each EIS (i.e. for generator projects) refers to different housing strategies and asking what will be included in the EIS?

EnergyCo Response: Clarified this was referring to an influx of people requiring housing and it was stated housing will be discussed in the next part of this meeting - social impact assessment.

- CRG member asked if EnergyCo can make a recommendation for an extended exhibition period?

EnergyCo response: It can be discussed but not formally recommended.

- CRG member indicated that legacy housing is a topic of ongoing discussion with EnergyCo - whatever is decided must include housing investment for the long term.
- CRG member requested update on housing in a future meeting.

EnergyCo response: Suggested it can be included in a dedicated online session as it is topical for both North and South CRGs.

Action: Offer online session for housing.

- CRG member indicated that Uralla has been discussing housing with EnergyCo for a long time.
- EnergyCo noted the REZ wide studies include a focus on workforce accommodation.

Item 6. Break

- Break from 1.10pm to 1.34pm

Item 7. Social Impact Assessment overview

- Presented by Jess Anagnostaras, Umwelt Manager Social & Community Practice.
- Follow State government guidelines to assess social impacts of project.
- Social Impact Assessment guidelines applicable to critical state significant infrastructure (CSSI) updated earlier this year. This is a process to identify and assess likely social impacts of a project.
- Includes any consequence of a development on people encompassing individuals, groups, households and whole communities.
- Assessment of impacts to way of life, community, access to services and infrastructure, health and wellbeing, culture, decision-making systems, livelihoods, and surroundings.
- Scope is looking at network infrastructure project as the SIA is focused on project impact.
- Outline of process alongside EIS process - SIA will form part of EIS and is undertaken concurrently.
- Starting in early 2023, we have worked through key phases of scoping, report (current), and then post-approval social impact management plan if required.
- Study area is the area of influence or social locality, such as communities and areas impacted. Captured key communities along the alignment, looking at LGAs, key townships and regions.
- High-level methodology includes an initial scoping phase involving a desktop review and community profile analysis to establish the existing context, followed by a preliminary assessment. The social baseline is then developed as a comprehensive analysis combining both primary and secondary data inputs.
- The impact prediction and assessment phase identifies potential impacts based on the information gathered, supported by community and stakeholder consultation to further understand, validate, and verify impacts along the alignment.
- Review of other technical assessments to incorporate touchpoints from visual, noise, cultural to compile and analyse key issues.
- Mitigation and management measures are developed for each social impact.
- Consultation began in 2023, with the team working alongside EnergyCo at community information sessions, as well as through SIA interviews and discussions held at community events.
- The team is also working closely with Place Managers to identify and understand potential impacts on landholders.

- Earlier this year a series of interviews, workshops and meetings were undertaken with community groups, councils and service providers to get a variety of stakeholder input.
- Launched an online community survey from April which was widely shared among communities and networks.
- Information sessions led by EnergyCo included SIA team members.
- Engagement for the SIA is not complete, and the process will continue.
- Method for determining significance involves investigating, verifying, and validating impacts, followed by assessing them in accordance with the relevant guidelines. This includes considering the magnitude and likelihood of each impact and identifying how varying impacts and intensities can be mitigated at a detailed, granular level.
- Both a technical significance rating and perceived significance rating is undertaken to ensure community voice of affected stakeholders is captured.
- The assessment guideline provides a matrix tool to determine the level of impact.
- Community engagement to inform the SIA has included key informant interviews with seven councils, nine service providers, and six community groups; more than 500 survey responses; 170 feedback forms; and a review of secondary data, including information from EnergyCo's engagement team.
- Scoping Report engagement summary identified the top ten key issues raised as: low levels of trust in decision-making systems; design change requests; impacts on environmental features; changes to rural landscape character; opposition to the project; opposition to consultation practices; concerns about remuneration; devaluation of property; and perceived inequitable distribution of impacts.
- Throughout this process, we have tried to best capture what is being heard from people on the ground.
- Working through completion of SIA consultation and collation and analysis of new information and comparison of information.
- A community survey was rolled out to capture broader view and input received with over 500 responses.
- Comment from CRG member that issues would be different depending on area.

Response: Understanding key differences affects how certain issues are understood and managed. A question regarding location in the survey has helped to determine geographical difference of respondents and key issues raised.

- Program of consultation planned with First Nations representatives and community members.
- Further consultation with community groups and interested parties or affected stakeholders planned.
- Coordination with REZ wide studies is important and touch points overlap, collaborating with other teams to use the findings in SIA.
- Collating all findings into one report that will be included in the EIS.
- If project is approved a further management plan may also be required.

Chair called for questions and comments in relation to the SIA – with around the room opportunity for each member.

- CRG member commented that the study is important and that Walcha requires more information about it. They expressed concern that the community has not been sufficiently involved and that there are divided views within the area. The member emphasised the importance of understanding and managing these impacts and expressed a desire for greater community involvement in Walcha. They also suggested that the survey may not have been widely circulated and that Council may have made a submission without broader community consultation.

EnergyCo response: Project update emails included a link to survey and CRG members also distributed this widely. A flyer was mail boxed. Walcha residents had returned a good representative response, gaps in participation and localised issues can be addressed through further meetings with people.

- Comment from CRG member that cumulative impact is significant and serious and people answering questions don't understand how important it is. Data won't be true to considerations of cumulative impact, reports should have been completed prior to anything else happening, and assessing data shouldn't happen until cumulative impact information is provided. Legislation doesn't make anyone accountable. Answers from community won't be what's needed because they weren't informed.

EnergyCo response: SIA data will be informed by ongoing consultation.

- Comment from CRG member that an informed community engagement process isn't being undertaken for people to feel they are a part of this and the report won't be the best it could be.

EnergyCo response: The SIA is for the project itself, however EnergyCo is also doing other work to address broader social needs and opportunities for the REZ as a whole, including generation projects, which will contribute to that understanding.

- CRG member asked if this will be a sixth piece in addition to the five REZ wide studies.

EnergyCo response: There will be another piece looking at broader impact analysis, which has come feedback from the Upper House Inquiry.

- There are three pieces of work related to this topic: The SIA in the EIS looks at infrastructure, the REZ wide studies consider the REZ as a whole, and there will be a broader piece looking at overarching social impact across all REZs.

- CRG member asked when this will happen as REZ wide studies haven't been released.

EnergyCo response: EnergyCo are aware people need this information. REZ wide studies are to establish an understanding. Councils have been engaged and we have recently briefed them on the studies, which will be shared with community soon.

- CRG member asked if REZ wide studies will change prior to release to public.

EnergyCo response: There may be changes based on feedback from councils and timelines for construction and workforce estimations.

- CRG member indicated that it is surprising there has been so much talk about this, it is concerning and it creates a perception, leading people to draw their own conclusions.

Response that government processes can be slow but working as quickly as possible.

- CRG member suggested when the information is put out about the REZ wide studies, it needs to be explained – the why and the context.

EnergyCo response: The intent of consulting with the Councils first was to ensure the studies were correct, but the feedback is noted.

- CRG member noted the methodology and scoping report engagement summary, alongside REZ wide studies, data may be skewed by Armidale and Tamworth as the larger population centres. A more identifiable set of themes from South and North is needed as concerns on the Tablelands are different from the South.
- CRG member commented on perceived secrecy around documents is concerning. If EnergyCo wants valuable feedback they need to provide CRG with the REZ wide studies and trust the CRG to come back with community feedback and concerns. If the CRG is more than a token gesture, there must be possibility for CRG to know what is going on to adequately communicate community perspective and remain informed. Secrecy and changes are aggravating to the community.
- Comment by CRG member that the REZ is a large area and individual communities can provide valuable feedback.

EnergyCo response: Based on the information gathered so far from the survey, there is good representation in the responses, and they are not skewed to the South or population centres. Graph was included in presentation for the purpose of discussion on overarching issues, in the scoping report it is broken down by locality and stakeholder and the SIA will feature this information.

- CRG member confirmed that Voice for Walcha group had shared the survey.

Item 8. First Nations engagement

- Presented by Leanne Thompson, New England REZ Senior First Nations Advisor.
- NSWALC is the LALC peak body/governing body and EnergyCo attended a regional meeting to share project information.
- This included high level messaging and discussion about job readiness.
- Leanne Thompson attended gathering in Dubbo for CWO and looked at what is working in that space.
- Penny Sharpe MP announced Community and Employment Benefits Program.
- Tamworth face-to-face project update will be scheduled for mid-October.
- SIA interviews will be scheduled for November, please refer all Aboriginal stakeholders to be part of these interviews.
- CRG member asked if SIA interviews will be held in every town.

EnergyCo response: Interviews will be carried out with Umwelt. The plan is for a full day in Armidale, Tamworth and then Uralla, Muswellbrook, Singleton. Six to eight interviews each day.

- Request from CRG member for interviews to be carried out in Walcha.
- Comment from Tamworth LALC representative that Tamworth LALC members September meeting has occurred. TACCO would be good to consult with, and another Tamworth member meeting will occur before end of the year.

EnergyCo response: EnergyCo will be happy to attend.

- CRG member asked about the level of Aboriginal representation on the CRG, the application of DCCEE's First Nations engagement guidelines, and whether the CRG should seek to include more Aboriginal voices.

EnergyCo response: Engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders has been building over time. Armidale has been particularly proactive, with Tamworth also increasing its engagement more recently. There is a native title claim within the REZ boundary that has been discussed with the relevant organisations holding the appropriate mandate. The DCCEE guidelines will lead to the establishment of a First Nations Working Group, which Leanne will oversee. Representation on the CRG is not due to a lack of effort; however, there are often competing priorities, and Aboriginal-specific briefings are generally preferred to ensure cultural safety and allow cultural issues to be discussed in a dedicated setting. CRG members may wish to observe an Aboriginal briefing to better understand these priorities. Consultation for the Aboriginal Heritage Assessment also involves engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders.

- Question from CRG member about whether Aboriginal communities have a high level of understanding about projects.

EnergyCo response: Information is being regularly shared. Example of the controversy around Santos being a major sponsor for Koori Knockout and this indicated high level of understanding and engagement regarding these matters.

- Comment that Tamworth LALC refuses sponsorship from mines, while Gunnedah LALC has had a different approach.

Item 9. General business and questions

- Overview of the social outcomes reference group and call for nominations.
- EnergyCo has engaged Astrolabe to undertake social risk and opportunity analysis to understand, predict and manage social consequences and maximise social benefit and opportunities.
- Request for members of the CRG to nominate to participate as per information shared.
- Comment from CRG member that timeline for nominations (due tomorrow) is too short to consider, subject to required commitment.

Action: Email to provide more information about social outcomes reference group, including time commitments and operation.

- Comment from CRG member that REZ wide studies and SIA need to be released before social outcomes can be properly considered.

- Nominations close 25 September with request for 2 CRG members to nominate.
- Next meeting date was discussed. A suggestion was made to hold it on 27 November around lunchtime in Armidale, with an alternative option for the following week depending on availability. Later discussion indicated that the first week of December may be a more suitable time.
- Reiteration from CRG member that EIS 28-day exhibition period is too short and needs to be extended.

EnergyCo response: It is a DPHI decision, and DPHI will respond to queries from community regarding this request.

- CRG member suggested EnergyCo request a longer exhibition period to show good will to the community.
- CRG member requested updates on progress of intergovernmental cooperation.

EnergyCo response: This is occurring at a departmental secretary level and they will be guided by REZ wide studies. There is some direction for the roadmap that requires the whole of government approach.

- CRG member asked for the current EIS timeline.

EnergyCo response: The route near Glenbawn Dam and Chaffey Dam will need to be changed. As a result EnergyCo will need to see if EIS must be changed accordingly, which would delay release from late 2025. Further information will be provided once confirmed.

- CRG member suggested that REZ wide studies need to be released with enough time for community to read and understand prior to EIS being released.

EnergyCo response: They are two separate processes and there will be ample time to consider both.

- Comment from CRG member that legacy housing must be considered when addressing cumulative impacts and this would be a good approach.

EnergyCo response: This is certainly a consideration but different councils have different expectations for housing, including legacy housing and work camps, and this must be balanced across the project.

- CRG member asked when cumulative impact studies will be released?

EnergyCo response: They are with council for 2 weeks and depending on level of feedback they may be released in the next month.

- CRG member asked if 330 and 500 kV lines will be dual to the hubs.

EnergyCo response: The Scoping Report shows the line is dual until it splits, and then single line to central south and central. Orange line in figure from scoping report is dual, all else is single.

- CRG member noted that water, housing and education are priorities and a separate discussion for these would be helpful.
- Meeting closed 2.48pm

#	Action	Responsible	Status
1	Provide information about access to REZ wide studies and if changes are made based on council feedback	Melissa Maurer	
2	Provide EIS timeline to CRG	Melissa Maurer	Completed. Provided in project update on 2 October 2025.
3	Confirm that information about flora and fauna surveys is provided to landholder on request and ensure landholders can receive information about flora and fauna on their property	Melissa Maurer	
4	Provide information regarding the engagement of local ecologists	Umwelt	
5	Provide information about required drone distance to mitigate noise disturbance	Umwelt	
6	Confirm if feral animals are included in fauna surveys	Umwelt	
7	Provide information about level of approval required from RAPs	Umwelt	
8	Provide information about location of dual transmission lines	Melissa Maurer	
9	Offer online session for housing	Melissa Maurer	
10	Email to provide more information about social outcome reference group including time commitments and operation.	Melissa Maurer	Completed. Sent following meeting on 24 September 2025.

Upcoming meeting

- Next meeting - November/December – **Proposed for Thursday 4 December middle of the day.**