

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Community Reference Group (CRG) North – Meeting 6

Held on: Friday 20 March – 11am to 1.30pm

Location: Walcha Council Offices, 2W Hamilton Street, Walcha

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

Attended

Role	Attendee
Chairperson	Margaret Harvie
Community Representatives	Alex Hunter Bruce McMullen James Reilly Annette Kilarr Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha
LALC Representatives	
LGA delegates	Armidale Regional Council – Cr Paul Gaddes Uralla Shire Council – Cr Sarah Burrows Walcha Council - Cr Rachael Greig
EnergyCo Representatives	Julian Watson, New England REZ Deputy Project Director Aaron Davies, New England Property Lead Michael Burden, New England REZ Coordination Lead* Leanne Thompson, New England REZ Senior First Nations Advisor* Melissa Maurer, New England REZ Community Engagement Manager Matt Miller, Communications and Engagement Manager
Transport for NSW representatives	Anna Zycki, Executive Director, Development and Solutions, Transport for NSW*
Note taker Kate McGrath	Kate McGrath

*Online attendance

Apologies

Inverell Shire Council – Mayor Kate Dight

Declarations of interest

Member	Details
Sarah Burrows	Pecuniary interest. Landholder of property in proposed transmission line corridor.
Kate McGrath	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

Acknowledgement of Country

- Meeting opened at 11am.
- The Chair acknowledged that we are meeting on Dunghutti Aboriginal land, paid respects to Elders past, present and emerging.
- Chair thanked Walcha council for hosting the CRG meeting.

Item 1. Welcome, housekeeping and meeting procedures

- Chair welcomed members and outlined the structure of meeting including the addition of a Project Update section that will now be a standing agenda item.
- Reported on the recruitment for CRG members - there are two new members for South CRG but still two vacancies following another resignation.
- Since our last meeting, Tony Lashlie has resigned from the North CRG. Diane Gray also resigned this week due to a change in employment. Therefore, North CRG now has two vacancies.
- EnergyCo suggested they would recruit to fill vacancies following the 1km refinement announcement in April to enable recruitment to be finalised for the June meeting.
- CRG members are encouraged to invite members.
- CRG member suggested that the route alignment does not impact memberships for CRG. Suggestion that CRG recruitment commence now and be finalised when the route is known.
- EnergyCo comment that it would be good to recruit for the South and North groups at the same time and there is no downside to a longer recruitment time. Advised EnergyCo would aim to finalise membership in May for a June meeting and to be clear about the timeline with applicants.

Action: Commence the advertising process for CRG recruitment early to maximise opportunity to nominate.

- CRG member asked who the new South members represent?
 Response from Chair that they are community representatives with membership and links to lots of community groups, one is an Upper Hunter Shire Councillor.
- CRG member asked who decides on new members. Chair confirmed that she is responsible for deciding future membership. Chair explained that if there are a lot of applicants then considerations include diversity of geographical representation and connection to community.
- CRG member pointed out that Tenterfield, Glen Innes and Inverell are not attending, and if more Walcha representatives want to join then let them, and also Uralla and Armidale, this is where the action is.
- CRG member reminded the CRG meeting that we are not a decision-making body, our job is to listen to community and report back and then EnergyCo shares information to report back to community. It will be rockier as the timeline for implementation gets closer and the community will be demanding answers. CRG needs concrete answers to questions. We advise and collect information.
- Chair explained that final membership will depend on who nominates.
- CRG member suggested that EnergyCo is unlikely to be inundated by applications.
- CRG member requested link for CRG membership application be distributed to CRG so that it can be shared.

Action: EnergyCo to share link for CRG membership application with CRG members.

- Actions from the last meeting noted

#	Action	Responsible	Status
1	Share data for inclusion in the BioNet database prior to publication.	J Watson	Response: Ecologists working on the project are required to report findings into the BioNet database via an annual return process linked to their individual accreditation. The data gathered is therefore not generally available for public sharing prior to publication in the database. We remain happy, however, to provide summaries of the findings from individual property surveys with landowners upon request.
2	Request that EnergyCo reimburse CRG member travel expenses.	J Watson	This request is being considered by EnergyCo, and a response will be provided shortly.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
3	Communicate to Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) that the CRG would like for them to attend and participate.	L Thompson	Completed. EnergyCo regularly undertakes specific work and engages with LALCs and community in a way which creates space for discussion of relevant issues, and initiates partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders. This allows EnergyCo to hear concerns directly from community, and for community to progress matters as they arise. The LALCs have been made aware of the existence and presence of the CRGs and the standing invitation to participate.
4	Councils to consider writing to Minister for Energy and EnergyCo CEO asking for the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies to be released.	Council representatives	Completed. Regional Major Infrastructure Studies were publicly released for review and comment during December 2025 (post CRG meeting).
5	EnergyCo's engagement with Local Government regarding infrastructure and services to be on the agenda for the next meeting.	M Maurer	An update is being provided as part of the next meeting (20 March).
6	Liaise about contacts for Uralla Aboriginal groups.	L Thompson S Burrows	Completed. Email issued to contacts on 18 February 2026.
7	Feedback that the compensation should be ongoing (purchase or a lease payment) to be passed on to the Land and Property Team.		Completed. It should be noted that compensation related to the project is governed by the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 and the Energy Utilities and Administration Act 1987. Feedback such as this is also reported to our project and organisational leadership for awareness and consideration.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
8	Confirm if the 250-metre construction easement is subject to a leasing payment.		<p>If EnergyCo acquires an interest in land, the landholder is entitled to compensation under the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 ('Just Terms' Act). 'Just Terms' compensation typically includes the market value relevant to the interests EnergyCo needs to acquire for uses such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the temporary construction easement (if required) • the permanent transmission easement.
9	Provide information about the different payments and what they mean, and the associated processes of voluntary and compulsory acquisition.		<p>An update is being provided as part of the next meeting (20 March). EnergyCo has also developed several fact sheets covering the acquisition and compensation processes: Understanding the Land Acquisition Process Valuation and Compensation Explained Compulsory Acquisition Explained</p>

#	Action	Responsible	Status
10	Report back on whether legislation change will impact upon the Central West-Orana (CWO) Community Employment Benefits Program (CEBP) model		<p>The <u>Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020</u> initially required EnergyCo to provide Community Employment and Benefits Program (CEBP) funding to communities within the geographic boundary of a REZ.</p> <p>In response to community feedback, the NSW Government introduced changes as part of the <u>Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2025</u>, broadening the CEBP's eligibility scope.</p> <p>The changes allow EnergyCo to provide funding to communities in any Local Government Area (LGA) or Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) that intersects with a REZ boundary rather than just within the REZ boundary itself.</p> <p>The Bill also changed eligibility rules to make it easier for unemployed and vulnerable people to access employment programs designed through the CEBP for their benefit.</p> <p>All amendments will be reflected in the <i>Grant Guidelines</i> for future rounds of the CEBP. While base eligibility has been expanded, future grant streams will be subject to further eligibility and merit requirements (set out through Guidelines).</p> <p>Being located within a LGA or LALC that intersects a REZ should not be understood as a guarantee to receive benefit funding, with applicants required to comply with relevant guidelines.</p>
11	Include the CEBP and structure of other benefit payments in the next agenda for explanation.		As the CEBP for the New England REZ is still in the very early stages of development, this item will be included in a future agenda
12	Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) presentation to be subject of an online meeting during 2026.		EnergyCo confirms this can be considered and arranged.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
13	Indicate whether the capacity studies consider the impact of future decommissioning of the TransGrid 330 kilovolt lines in the region.		The decommissioning of these lines was not included. The studies are based on point-in time data as of November 2024 when the analytical framework was established for the studies. Projects included were those in the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) major planning portal, and those identified through consultation with generators.
14	List some of the purposes for which funding supplied by EnergyCo to Local Government has been used.	J Watson	<p>Councils have used the commissioning payment scheme to develop studies, investigations and strategies to which EnergyCo has contributed, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Management Strategies [Armidale and Uralla] • waste proposals [Uralla], and • strategic land use strategies [Walcha]. <p>The primary aim of the scheme is to enable Councils to respond to the development of the REZ, and there is in-built flexibility to allow Councils to nominate the specific support they need.</p>
15	Provide the timeline for the remaining Regional Major Infrastructure Studies to be publicly released.		Studies will be released as they are finalised. The Traffic and Transport Study is expected to be released later this year.
16	Information updates shared with Councils to be presented as an agenda item at the next CRG meeting.		Council engagement update to be provided as part of the next meeting (20 March).

#	Action	Responsible	Status
17	Provide a list of relevant key water resources to be used for the project.		The Water and Wastewater Study compiled as part of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies includes a section which examines the water resources relevant to the project. While not nominating any specifically for use, the section lists regulated, unregulated and groundwater sources which interact with the project footprint. The project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will include a water assessment detailing the project's predicted potable and non-potable water demand, as well as available water sources and supply arrangements to meet the predicted demand, and measures to minimise impacts on other water users.
18	Offer online session focused on housing.	M Maurer	To be completed. Following the release of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, this will be considered for 2026.
19	Deeper discussion about workforce accommodation.	Chair	To be completed. To be scheduled for a future CRG meeting. Information to be provided to the CRG as it becomes available.

Item 2. Project update – Julian Watson – Overview of key developments since our last meeting and upcoming activities

Presented by Julian Watson, New England REZ Deputy Project Director. He reported the following (as per slide 9 in the presentation):

- 480 submissions received which will help develop a feedback report.
- General ongoing enquiries management, as well as a standing order from parliament received.
- CRG member asked if part of the process is sharing information about expenditure.
- EnergyCo representative indicated that they would comply with the terms of the Standing Order 52.
- CRG member asked if EnergyCo are going to provide the costing and expenditure to date and the expenditure moving forward in response to the Standing Order 52.
- EnergyCo representative responded yes, if it is required under the Standing Order 52.
- CRG member asked why is that relevant.
- CRG member responded that it is relevant to know the spending.
- CRG member commented that it is not for CRG to demand this, the State allocates the money, and I can't see how it is going to provide better information to the community.

- CRG member comment that they get asked about the cost of the project a lot because it is electricity users that are paying for the REZ and comparing it to other options is very relevant.
- CRG member comment that the cost is simply not up to us as a CRG, other people are bound by the Terms of Reference and law to provide what they are able to give us, there is no point giving EnergyCo the third degree about information they aren't able to share, decisions have been made by successive governments and we should be focused on the impact on our community, not millions spent across the state.
- Chair asked that in the interest of time in the meeting and getting to the core items, this conversation should be held to general business.
- CRG member comment that the cost of the project is public knowledge and there is ample information available and it is the decision of politicians.
- EnergyCo spoke to securing the services of Farmgate support system in addition to the existing phone support available for community members. Information will be shared with stakeholders and CRG members and or the groups they represent can let people know support is available, it is different than previous option, they are confidential services and completely free.
- CRG member suggested landholders don't want to tick the consultation box - is accessing help counted as consultation with EnergyCo?
EnergyCo indicated this is not counted as consultation and they will not be aware if anyone accesses this service. EnergyCo is not provided with this information from the provider.
- CRG member suggested that accessing mental health support can be listed and used against people later, can this happen accessing Farmgate?
EnergyCo response that it is a private service provider and EnergyCo are not made aware of anyone accessing the service. EnergyCo is not aware of any instance where accessing the system is documented and used against a person.
- Chair shared suggestion from South CRG to place information in doctors' surgeries and distributing through neutral avenues.
- EnergyCo comment that there was feedback from South CRG that support may not be well received when offered directly from EnergyCo and we are open to ideas about the best way to get information out there. A digital copy is in the appendix to the presentation and contact details are on the back.
- Project update report from EnergyCo as per slides 10 and 11:
 - Reported on Council engagement with regular and structured meetings, and informal interaction to discuss issues and solutions.
 - Following the release of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, workshops are underway with councils to get feedback about council priorities, additional opportunities and ideas, and building off the studies to get the council perspective to maximise opportunities.
 - Council Commissioning Agreement is the support package to provide financial support for engagement and preparation for REZ development. EnergyCo has secured additional

funding for next phase of identifying opportunities and help prepare for the impacts and mitigate them and maximise opportunities.

— Third Party Agreement is effectively a contract between council and EnergyCo which captures elements of the transmission project as it relates to council, to provide council with a level of certainty about what EnergyCo will deliver and sets out council rights and obligations. EnergyCo is funding the external legal support for councils in these negotiations, acknowledging council resources are constrained. This legal support is confidential between councils and the legal provider.

- CRG member asked if council commissioning agreements are ongoing, what is the timeframe? EnergyCo indicated that the original term is three years, we value the relationships and the intent is to extend this (subject to approval).

- CRG member asked is EnergyCo discussing the Community Employment Benefit Program vision with councils.

EnergyCo indicated that the current discussions are to help inform early enabling works, however for several councils that does include some things that better fit in the Community Benefit Employment Program and EnergyCo will take that on board.

- CRG member asked what is the Community Employment Benefit Program?

EnergyCo indicated that the Community Employment Benefit Program (CEBP) is the access payments to be distributed, including \$1700 per megawatt per generator per year for community and \$600 per megawatt per generator per year for employment which forms the funding bucket.

- CRG member indicated that Uralla Council is looking at using the third-party agreement as a template for all projects that come into the Shire to manage and make expectations clear.
- CRG member asked if these agreements could be applied to all renewable energy projects.
- CRG response that it's relevant to all councils, Uralla are just the first to initiate this. It's a formalised agreement with EnergyCo developed by a third party which benefits the council and can be used as a template for generator projects.
- CRG member asked if the agreements are enforceable.
- CRG member response that it's enforceable with EnergyCo. It's completely enforceable and it's a good basis for other companies because they won't look good if they don't do similar to EnergyCo, it's a good starting point.
- CRG member asked if council commissioning agreements provide additional funding for cumulative impacts?

EnergyCo responded that the funding is to progress opportunities coming off the back of the studies and support preparedness. The additional funding is the expansion of the existing package; it's in addition to the \$250k per annum.

- CRG member response that there is money to get projects to funding ready stage, what is the additional funding?

EnergyCo indicated that the initial funding package has been increased with the view that it helps the next phase of the opportunities development and is separate to CEBP. It is effectively an expansion of the existing package.

- CRG member commented the large tranche of money is to help with community impact.
- CRG asked if we are able to talk about the funding made available to council, is it public knowledge?
- CRG member indicated that it is potentially a large lump of money, but it may not be public yet, \$250k for positions within council to support transition is confirmed.

EnergyCo indicated that they don't mention figures. The support EnergyCo has provided to date has been well received, and we are providing more support to plan for and take the steps to mitigate and minimise impact. Plan to increase community input into CEBP and early enabling works. EnergyCo is liaising with councils to talk about how they might wish to prioritise projects and activities for early and enabling works. EnergyCo indicated it is keen to build on the community capability and hold a similar process to get feedback from community groups as to where they see some of the priorities being important, what projects or activities they would they like to see, to utilise the depth of community knowledge in the CRG.

- CRG member indicated that this is irritating. There have been hundreds of hours spent on feedback, why would we put more time in. Are you going to listen?

EnergyCo response that this is a process to get input to initiatives, rather than input about stopping the project.

- CRG member comment that there are no community groups advocating to stop the project.
- Chair asked for clarification on the question to the CRG, are EnergyCo looking for recommendations for investment based on what the CRG are hearing in the community?

EnergyCo indicated that the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies identified gaps and opportunities, and there is a process for feedback from councils to identify opportunities to mitigate impacts and maximise the opportunities. We'd like there to be a community led aspect too, the CRG is well placed to do that. It will be useful to do once the council work is complete and the councillors who are present can hear what the community group input is and as this is being discussed, the community groups can gain an understanding of how council have identified these priorities. Preparation for early and enabling works and CEBP is a large body of work. We are proposing that the CRG advise what opportunities might look like. This is in direct response to feedback that there were gaps in the online survey structure (that accompanied the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies) and there needs to be opportunity to share ideas.

- CRG member indicated that it's a good start, we'll have to see what it looks like. Will this happen alongside other processes to inform outcomes?

EnergyCo said, yes it was to inform the CEBP and enabling infrastructure. It's a long way away, 2032 is technically when generators start paying into the fund, but we want the process to be moving and have an early plan for what that the expenditure of these large sums looks like.

- CRG member suggested that some communities already have high employment and don't need investment in employment or training initiatives.
- Chair indicated that this is the point of the exercise - to determine what the communities want and don't want.
- CRG member comment that there has been countless engagement, and you haven't heard loud and clear.

EnergyCo response that we are looking at how the funds drawn from the access scheme can be used to support community and employment, where communities feel there is value is not for EnergyCo to determine.

EnergyCo reiterated there are two things happening at the same time; the development of the CEBP, which is a formal process being developed and tailored for the New England REZ. The other stream is the enabling infrastructure; water, waste, water, housing, local supply chain – effectively the topics of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies. This is an opportunity to address these challenges, and if people want to participate in that then they are welcome. People may not be interested in how to increase capacity of sewage treatment, but will have other ideas and we are interested to hear them.

- CRG member indicated that they definitely want to input. Concern is how, and wanting it to be useful work, and there is an educational piece about the council conversation and the CEBP kind of sits around that. Each council's Community Strategic Plan should also inform this and there is a need for them to align, so we need to be on the same page in some way.

EnergyCo indicated that the process includes a lot of that, and we're happy to prepare a template to structure ideas and be able to insert this into the process, to help structure any opportunities identified by CRG members.

- CRG member indicated that it sounds great, must be contextual and build community capacity in the process, and build awareness of opportunity. Reference made to the Energy Charter work bringing people to the table for conversations to build on what has already been built and noted EnergyCo participation at a recent Energy Charter roundtable event.
- CRG member indicated that the next term of council will be the important one for the strategy to be focused on, it will be timely for the period in question. September 2028 is the next election year.
- CRG member suggested that Armidale and Tamworth will benefit from CEBP, Walcha and Uralla won't because they don't need or want support with employment, it's concerning that it will go to another council.

EnergyCo indicated that it won't necessarily go to another council, if there is no bid then there's no choice but to allocate it to another bidder. It will be up to Councils to determine what funding and initiatives they bid for.

- CRG member comment that Walcha will miss out because we don't need or want large projects and then that must go to another place, but we still bear the brunt of projects and don't get the benefit.

EnergyCo response that funding can be targeted for the need in the community, it isn't just infrastructure it could be travel support and scholarships.

- CRG comment that those items would only need a small amount of funding, but large infrastructure will get more.
- CRG comment that it's wasteful expenditure with an inflationary impact, why do it?
- Chair requested the conversation about cost benefit be held to general business.
- CRG member clarified what they meant in relation to the statement about employment funding, this being the need for equity in spending across Councils.

EnergyCo representative indicated that is part of the CEBP process and there will be a dedicated consultation process. Suggest that CRG members have a look at what's been happening with the CEBP project in Central West Orana REZ and how they have responded to community need.

- Chair has agreed to the request of one of the CRG members that in the future CEBP will be a standing agenda item for meetings.

Action: Include Community Employment Benefit Program update as a standing item for future meeting agendas.

Item 3. CRG member updates – what are you hearing from your communities? What are the key issues?

- CRG member shared ideas for the CEBP, Armidale council is focused on infrastructure and has a VPA system for community benefit. Reclassification of roads and upgrades required is something that has been discussed, and beyond just getting things to site. Telecommunications upgrades needed during the construction phase; the additional bodies will put pressure on the system. University has some programs around initiatives for getting doctors back into the region and this could dovetail into these programs; GPs are federal but there is a need to get boots on the ground.
- CRG member is hearing from the community some less than complementary things. Water is currently restricted and we aren't even in a drought yet. Construction needs can't come from our supply; water runs downhill and EnergyCo can't take water at the expense of ratepayers. People are very concerned about this. Council is trying to negotiate for more water security, but people are concerned.
- CRG member comment that waste facilities are nearly full, these projects will generate waste, and this will congest the road because we can't store it here. There needs to be a location identified.
- CRG member comment that roads get destroyed during construction, will council be able to quickly communicate to EnergyCo and Transport for NSW when roads need to be repaired, because council can and will restrict access on their local roads.
- CRG comment that the town most impacted by construction is Uralla with 3000 workers at mid-2030 peak and will EnergyCo be able to build the accommodation and services needed for an additional 3000 people? We don't even have an ambulance, and the Armidale hospital is

facing staff shortages, there needs to be a plan. We can't cater for our population to double. With 900 people working just on the transmission line in Uralla prior to peak, we'll need housing too and we need to know if there's going to be removable or legacy housing. There has been a 57% increase on rent based on speculation and this is having a current impact. Is the council going to have opportunity to improve its approval process given that state planning has already refused some rezoning?

EnergyCo indicated that accommodation will be a combination of looking for legacy opportunities suitable for each LGA as well as establishment of worker camps as needed. Where and what they include and whether they provide any legacy infrastructure is part of the current development process. There is work to do with council to ensure that the difference and priority in each LGA is considered.

- CRG member asked when will engagement on the workforce accommodation sites occur?
EnergyCo indicated that there will be information in the EIS, which is expected to be published by the end of the year. We expect to engage on these sites prior to this.
- CRG comment that the EIS is for the EnergyCo project, we need to know for the entire REZ to avoid the chaos in CWO and there is a need for it to be centrally organised and staged.
EnergyCo indicated that the coordination piece needs to happen, it's been consistently fed back, and it's a challenge. The current EIS being developed by EnergyCo assesses the transmission infrastructure project, hence the need for the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies. EnergyCo does not have jurisdiction to police coordination in all areas but can facilitate an organised approach, and EnergyCo is looking at how to play a bigger part in the process. To an extent, if we do the coordination well, both communities and generators benefit from these challenges being overcome industry wide.
- CRG member comment about water as an example, how can EnergyCo centrally organise water without impacting our area.
EnergyCo indicated that DCCEEW Water is responsible for this and were involved in the development of the studies and they are actively working through this. Residential water will always be prioritised, and work is underway to try and address some of that through possible water treatment plant upgrades and efficiencies for example. We are providing a centralised response, and the studies themselves are a great example of that, and they look at the demand and now we look to mitigate the significant challenge that is water.
- CRG member indicated that the question was asked of DCCEEW, and they responded that it's up to each individual project.
EnergyCo response that is not accurate, the response was that each individual project needs to consider the many ways to address water. DCCEEW cannot mandate how much water is needed and how it gets moved, but DCCEEW are involved in the wider coordination of water management.
- CRG comment that the water required for the REZ is 1400GL into New England REZ and 400GL into Walcha alone, carting water from places outside the REZ. It is clear that the amount of truck movement is a complete impracticality.

EnergyCo response that the studies also highlight up front the assumptions are conservative for water (particularly the water needed for concrete) and the highest development scenario is assumed, which won't be the case, but the highest figure has been given to work from. There will be trucks carting water as part of the works, but the studies are looking to understand and model conditions and demand and look at how it can be addressed. The next phase is to get input from councils and manage the gap and CRG can contribute. The other part is the monitoring of the generator projects over time, and as the list of Access Right Holders become clear and the level of fidelity in the demand profile increases, EnergyCo and government are then better able to respond.

- CRG member indicated that EIS is meant to cover that, and sometimes developers say things that aren't true, and do the people assessing it know it isn't true. CRG comment that current project Winterbourne has mistruths referring to 90 extra places at a caravan park and extra in Uralla and carting water from the Hunter.
- CRG comment that Thunderbolts Way is the entry for all these projects and it's a local road, EnergyCo and Transport for NSW need to roll it in to a state road.
- CRG member suggested that it's a state significant project and they don't need to ask to do these things.
- Comment from CRG member that there is low unemployment, but young people leave to get work, with travel and scholarship support that may be help, but let's look at what the town and the REZ needs for all trades. We need incentives to attract apprentices to the region and provide young people with an opportunity.
- CRG member commented that ratepayers should not have to pay for any of the impacts, we are already paying through the teeth and not seeing any benefit.
- CRG indicated that they felt there is an argument to have education and employment benefit in Walcha, if council don't want it, the community do, we need education programs to keep young people, it doesn't have to be a TAFE, but we need education.
- CRG member indicated that the community understand the water estimates in the studies are an overestimate and a deliberately conservative approach, but such a big amount of water being used gives the wrong message and the study didn't show a good understanding of Walcha and the available water, we are different from Uralla whose water accessibility is quite dire.
- CRG member indicated that there are several submissions to the transmission line study corridor. Many are good ones from learned people, and with some tweaking away from some of the farmers, you may be able to satisfy the community and still achieve what you are trying to do.
- CRG member indicated that there is a clear message from Walcha that will be reinforced by the Council statement. REZ is gold plated, oversized, and south-central hub is not needed. EnergyCo have been hearing this for some time.
- CRG member indicated that water, roads, accommodation, health, telecommunications are all being worked on and it must be EnergyCo's issue to solve. If people all try to shop at the same

time they can't. Projects need to bring their own medical care simply because we don't have it and we can't provide for others and it should be mandated and included in the EIS regarding what projects need to do for healthcare.

- CRG members indicated that council is working on waste, roads, workforce accommodation and water. These are the big issues. Saying it will be a stretch over time for projects isn't true, EnergyCo wants everyone plugged in by 2032 or they will be penalised.

EnergyCo indicated they will be spread across Stages 1 and 2, and this will be considered by generators. Generators require greater certainty around EnergyCo's delivery timeframes, and this is expected to become clearer over time. Some projects may proceed by around 2032, while others may be delayed by several years depending on staging and market conditions.

- CRG member commented about the Energy Charter Roundtable process, there is a video and a report. The feeling is that it is happening and we'd like it to be done with us, not to us. Additional engagement is so important, and there are problems but also opportunities, and it's all so important to think about future community benefit. We need surety about water and see some baseline certainty that is being worked on, and we need to see it collectively and in the present.
- CRG member indicated that some things being worked on can't be discussed until they are firmer for private land and privacy.
- CRG member indicated that for the cumulative impacts we need an answer, even if it doesn't improve our confidence.
- CRG member commented about the nature and the renewables piece, the process changed. Conservation Investment Strategy responsibility has moved to DCCEE, and the environment doesn't appear as a topic outside the EIS. There is cumulative impact and environmental impact in all the areas in the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies.
- CRG member indicated there is word going around about big worrying projects that are coming through and how this is going to impact the environment and good agricultural country. Reiterated that accommodation issues and questions around the longevity of some of these buildings for short term workers. It seems very impractical to bring dongas in, but in the long term I hope some of this will be a benefit and not disappear. Education is a massive priority, and we don't want young people to leave our district and where can young people get their training? The practical trades needed for the REZ - those courses aren't necessarily available. How can EnergyCo work alongside TAFE and ensure the relevant training is available in the region. Online training isn't appropriate for young people who need practical application and supervision. It only takes one small mishap for things to go wrong, and we need to attract older experienced people.
- CRG member commented that water is a massive issue and it's disappointing to hear the suggestion to truck it in from other reservoirs. Potentially there is another El Nino, we're in a semi-drought now, and it's inevitable that it will happen sooner rather than later and the current resources need to be respected for our communities.

- CRG comment waste issues need circular economy projects. There are groups forming but it needs to take effect more, so maybe with the funding opportunities some councils may consider circular economy and how to turn waste into utilisable products.
- CRG member requested clarification on the RMIS studies, because they are conservative, the GW amount seems like the generation needed for an 8GW REZ.
- EnergyCo indicated that the question being asked seemed to be a question on the difference between generation and transfer capacity. The projects modelled in the studies were taken from the planning portal and noting some are redacted due to confidentiality, and each study made a series of assumptions (based on the topic area) to model a series of development scenarios where different numbers of projects were considered.
- CRG member asked if you're building transmission lines of 8GW which needs 19GW of generation, the lines are gold plated and you will need the water.
EnergyCo indicated that the amount of GW proposed for stage one and two includes 6GW. A future stage three is subject to need and won't be looked at until circa 2039.
- CRG member asked what stage 3 is, given that EnergyCo say you are legislated for an 8GW REZ.
EnergyCo indicated that the current project is for two stages of energisation at 2.4GW in Stage 1 and 3.6 in Stage 2 for a total of 6GW.
- Clarification following meeting: The project is planned to be delivered in two stages - Stage 1 will enable a 2.4 GW transfer capacity and Stage 2 will enable a further 3.6 GW of transfer capacity, unlocking up to 12 GW of total new renewable generation and 4 GW of storage, to connect to the grid by the mid-2030s.
- CRG member asked if the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies are based on 6GW or 8GW?
Response that it's 6GW. We must ensure what we build doesn't prejudice the ability to provide an additional 2GW in the future.
- CRG member asked how EnergyCo can say these are conservative numbers that might not happen.
EnergyCo indicated that conservative is utilising the upper bounds.
- CRG member indicated that it either is, or isn't. Are we going to have 1400 trucks at a time, or aren't we?
EnergyCo indicated that the number assumes all projects need to truck in water and are all being constructed at once. Commercial reality (and experience observed in the Central West Orana REZ) is that the peak will be flattened but it is important to understand the upper bounds.
- CRG member asked if it might be 700 trucks for 8 years, not 1400 for 3 years.
EnergyCo indicated that it cannot state that with certainty at this early stage. The study has inbuilt conservatism, and a high impact has been modelled. EnergyCo reiterated state agencies have been engaged. CRG is invited to be part of the process to mitigate impacts, the level of knowledge will only increase as project progresses. The height of the peak will likely flatten, and each project has its own planning and approval process.

- CRG member indicated that EnergyCo have done the studies and the report, and it has been shared with the community, and as a result people are nervous. EnergyCo are stepping away from the problem by saying it's up to the generators to solve it or saying the numbers aren't that bad.

EnergyCo noted this feedback and is progressing studies to better understand the scale of the issue and identify appropriate solutions. This process involves a period of uncertainty while the problem is defined.

Break 12.59pm to 1.04pm

Item 4. First Nations engagement update

Leanne Thompson presented information as per slide 15 and 16.

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council briefing held with Charles Lynch (Northern Region Councillor).
- 3 priority areas identified included:
 - preservation of culture and right to practice
 - CEBP opportunities and similar questions to CRG such as what does it look like, how will it be auspiced
 - opportunities for program funding for transfer of cultural knowledge, ranger programs, youth programs and addressing social issues.
- Project team had opportunity to comment on draft First Nation Guidelines which is a DCCEEW deliverable. Guidelines now going through internal approval process and then for Ministerial approval, stakeholders have been working to get this done.
- CRG member asked if the Guidelines are just for the transmission project?
- EnergyCo response that they are just for New England REZ EnergyCo project. CRG encouraged to have a look at [Central West Orana First Nations Guidelines](#) for an indication of what these may look like.
- Scar tree verification and test excavation happening in June 2026 in New England and Upper Hunter. Registered Aboriginal Parties working with EnergyCo for potential ring tree and artefact scatters and isolated finds, pads. Highly significant sites have not been identified, such as sacred sites, birthing caves or trees, these are all considered normal evidence of Aboriginal occupation.

Item 5. Oversize over mass (OSOM) transport route update

Presented by Michael Burden and Anna Zycki (Executive Director for TfNSW)

- Reminder that the primary object of Port to REZ is to facilitate a corridor for OSOM components such as blades and transformers, it's an important centralised transport piece to establish the corridors to detour town centres and minimise congestion and create a corridor that can be used quickly.
- EnergyCo are always considering current and future network use, such as strategic growth areas and school zones.

- Tight budget constraints and timeline, this work is done hand in glove with Transport for NSW and Councils as the road authorities.
- Assessments and routes are founded on site investigation surveys and engineering analysis to highlight suitable routes.
- Working on different aspects of the corridor and looking at a defined corridor and examining access issues such as large intersections for wide and heavy loads, and facilities along corridors that require road widening.
- Transport for NSW is looking at the physical movement along the corridor and the numbers of vehicles and where rest areas of breakdown facilities might be required, or to coordinate movement of multiple vehicles together and width and length of overtaking lanes and passing bays, curfews and network access.
- Movement scheme starts at the Port of Newcastle, looking at how and where components are stored and circulated and stacked and sequestered, and this will influence the number of vehicles that can leave in a 24-hour period. Staging locations may be needed for rest breaks and shift changes and managing when they can't be allowed on a section of highway due to curfew and safety risks.
- Curfews in metropolitan areas generally restrict travel to night-time hours. Movements are also limited through townships during school access times to minimise impacts on local businesses and the community, which can extend overall journey duration.
- Aim is to ensure the most efficient journey to get there as quickly as possible but also to make sure there are safety provisions in their interactions with other drivers, and the timing of vehicles and facilities are crucial to ensure they journey safely.
- Transport for NSW is taking a coordinated approach to managing the movements, a coordinated logistics function over and above the current role of Transport for NSW. For example, 8 or 9 of these vehicles on the road require good information about where they are, passing through key locations to minimise interruptions and get everyone where they need to be safely. We will look to manage in real time and work with transport industry to lock in some models that have been successfully used in other states and internationally. Consent conditions, access requirement and curfews will all be considered.
- Police provide escorts and working closely to do planning for provision of escorts and where they will be needed, and what types of vehicles require escorts or where a pilot only might be sufficient.
- As the work develops, targeting being able to share information with community towards the end of the year.
- CRG member asked where the Port to REZ finishes.
EnergyCo response was that it is being worked through, and some updates have been shared. It's important to differentiate between Port to REZ program and last mile upgrades required by each project (including the EnergyCo project). Port to REZ is the 'spine' to get equipment to the REZ, and a different process will look at distribution from the 'spine' to each project.

Consultation and feedback will be undertaken as those routes are developed. The Port to REZ program is not to get every component to every front door.

- CRG member commented that the central south hub in Walcha is accessible through Thunderbolts Way as a regional road, will Transport for NSW take it over as a state road? Transport for NSW indicated that they cannot comment at this point. There was a road reclassification process launched just before Christmas and council can apply to have that road assessed against the criteria. In terms of managing the impact on all roads, Transport for NSW is walking through a whole of life cycle cost model to estimate the impact of OSOM on the corridor and that will be completed in the next few months and Transport will then work with EnergyCo on how that can best support local government for their decision making about roads.

Transport for NSW is doing LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) surveys of roads for condition assessments and traffic surveys to help council decision making.

- CRG member asked if that included local roads? Transport for NSW confirmed this was the case.
- CRG member commented regarding logistics and curfews, I hope a small community like Uralla won't necessarily have OSOM rumbling through in the night when traffic might be lower and this will impact people's sleep.
- CRG member commented that there has been previous vehicular movement of turbines and BESS over the last few years and there is stuff already in place, I don't know if projects just did their own thing. There is massive concern about Thunderbolts Way and communities between Gloucester and Walcha and the practicalities to utilise it for heavy movements. In the case of a BESS coming from Brisbane to Uralla it couldn't negotiate Cunningham Highway and had to go via Tamworth to get to Uralla.

Transport for NSW confirmed that they are working closely with EnergyCo for the final route and movement to be on state roads as much as possible, upgrades will be needed. All these issues are exactly the point of the operational study we're doing. I can't tell you the exact time a vehicle would be at Uralla or Walcha as that section hasn't been finalised, but part of the assessment is looking at all of the pinch points as part of a logistics review.

Transport for NSW have been doing inspections along the defined corridor and looking at the infrastructure pinch points and the logistics review.

- CRG member comment that you can get ahead of the ball game and upgrade highways well in advance of this happening. Transport for NSW response confirmed that is occurring but we first need to know what the areas of improvement needed are.
- CRG member said thank you for suggestion for councils to ask for road reclassification, but council don't know what the data is for movement on those roads to know which ones to apply for.

Transport for NSW indicated that renewables and heavy vehicles isn't the only criteria, renewable OSOM is one factor in a comprehensive process that looks at function and connectivity of the road.

- CRG member asked if Transport for NSW are only looking at Port to REZ 'spine', who will ensure that the roads to the projects are also managed?

EnergyCo indicated that this is part of the EIS and the work of the network operator and the individual generator projects. Will need to do the work and each project will also need to determine. It's a combination, but with the Port to REZ centralising the 'spine' or 'common route', it should be more efficient.

- CRG member indicated the volume of road upgrades and increased traffic will affect our communities more and there should be some oversight by EnergyCo and Transport for NSW otherwise council will need more money to manage it because we don't have capacity. EnergyCo responded that the issue is known and councils are continuing to work with EnergyCo on how support can be provided across many different area, as noted earlier in the session.
- CRG member indicated that people are wondering if Muswellbrook is a problem area, and do you have any word about the height and width restrictions and what you might do with these issues?

EnergyCo indicated it is working on an alternative route in the area that will go around Muswellbrook when movements first start, Transport for NSW and EnergyCo are working together to keep as many movements as possible on the state road corridor so once the Muswellbrook bypass is complete movement will be diverted to that road.

- CRG member commented "good luck getting up the Moonbi Gap". We have many local roads leading directly to projects and we have experience of developers using a detour through the local roads, what policing powers does Transport for NSW have to make sure the projects abide by the regulations and ensure the road is left in the condition they found it. EnergyCo indicated that every proponent needs a specified route in their consent conditions and OSOM need a permit, and it's issued by Transport for NSW and National Heavy Vehicle Regulator for state roads, and council for local and regional roads. Council has options to work with proponents on things like impact on local roads. Investigations on council and state roads to look at genuine impact and understand OSOM impact and maintenance risk across the state.

Item 6. Easement acquisition and landowner payments

Presentation by Aaron Davies.

- Aaron advised he is part of a team responsible for acquiring the land to construct and operate the REZ and is happy to come and speak about acquisition process with community groups.
- Strategic Benefit Payment is an entitlement and attached to the land itself, paid by the Network Operator following generation and a separate form of compensation to that paid under the Just Terms Act. The Strategic Benefit Payment was also a fixed amount and not something that can be negotiated.

- EnergyCo will acquire freehold land through the Just Terms Act where it needs land permanently and on an exclusive basis. Easements are acquired where the project requires access to land with non-exclusive possession with the use of that land constrained through easement terms to protect the transmission asset to be constructed. Easements will be acquired based on a two-step acquisition process where EnergyCo will typically seek to acquire a construction easement of about 250m for construction and a 140m permanent easement to be located within the construction easement.
- Opening letter to landholder signals the start of the formal acquisition process, and will include a sketch plan and location of the temporary easement and likely location of permanent easement together with areas required to support access.
- EnergyCo's preference is to resolve the Just Terms compensation up front where EnergyCo would pay 100% of the market value of the temporary easement, 80% for the permanent and 100% of disturbance compensation. The remaining 20% would accumulate statutory interest and be paid to the landowner on completion of construction and the establishment of the permanent easement.
- CRG member asked if land was acquired freehold for south central hub. EnergyCo indicated that this acquisition was completed last Friday.
- CRG member asked about payments of annual instalments for the strategic benefit payment. People object to it being 20 years and not the life of the project.
EnergyCo indicated that this is government policy, and the \$200,000 (in 2022 dollars) per km of eligible transmission line (i.e.330kV and above) gets indexed. It's a mandated policy and EnergyCo is subject to this legislation.
- CRG member indicated that we need to pass this information from EnergyCo to the community - every landholder brings it up every single time.
EnergyCo comment that the network operator administers the strategic benefit payment, not EnergyCo, and that this information was available on EnergyCo's website and that EnergyCo's field agents would be pleased to meet landowners to explain the whole acquisition process and to respond to any queries that they may have.
- CRG asked when EnergyCo do compulsorily acquire land, is there a policy for regeneration?
EnergyCo indicated its strong preference is to acquire all land and interests in land by agreement. Where agreement cannot be reached for an easement, it may be acquired through a compulsory process. EnergyCo confirmed that, in such cases, the acquisition would be for an easement rather than freehold land, noting there had been some confusion on this point. Where an easement is acquired, EnergyCo/the Network Operator would make good the land following works.
Any vegetation clearing required would be managed in accordance with EnergyCo's biodiversity offset obligations. Efforts will be made to avoid clearing where possible; however, in some areas partial clearing or trimming may be required, taking into account both environmental considerations and ongoing maintenance requirements.

- CRG member asked about market value for easement area - how this will be fair and equitable, it sounds like each landowner negotiates separately. How do we make sure it's fair and equitable and someone doesn't get more. Land in Walcha is very expensive and how will market value hold up, how do you manage it so that someone doesn't get more just because they are a strong negotiator.

EnergyCo representative indicated that his job is to make sure that people are compensated properly, and in accordance with the Just Terms Act. EnergyCo noted that it recommended that landholders engage their own lawyer and valuer to help ensure this outcome is achieved. EnergyCo must reimburse the reasonable costs of independent advice. EnergyCo will continue to encourage landholders to obtain this advice even if they were to accept an offer of compensation without seeking this independent advice. EnergyCo won't recommend a lawyer or valuer to help protect the integrity in the process and to ensure landowners receive independent advice.

- CRG member asked if there is a public disclosure requirement for each acquisition.

EnergyCo indicated it is not published, and there is only RP data for freehold purchase - not easements.

- CRG request for a webinar for landowners to hear this information.

Happy to discuss further and progress this suggestion if the conversation is about acquisition process and not about individual properties. EnergyCo would welcome a general discussion and would continue to encourage landowners to obtain their own independent advice about anything specific to their property or circumstances.

- CRG member noted that some landholders believe EnergyCo will acquire their land through compulsory process, based on a misunderstanding that easements can only be acquired by agreement.

EnergyCo confirmed that easements can (and will) be acquired by compulsory agreement where an easement is required and the parties are unable to reach agreement on the easement. EnergyCo would not acquire freehold land of the same size by compulsory process where the parties were negotiating an easement during the negotiation period. EnergyCo are willing to speak with community members, those concerned, and solicitors about the process, but understand that many landowners do not want to engage with EnergyCo (hence the request for the webinar).

- CRG comment that EnergyCo is saying they will be doing land acquisition alongside the EIS.

EnergyCo response that yes, the land acquisition has commenced for hubs. The planning and acquisition processes are mutually exclusive and that EnergyCo can acquire land (as easements) without a planning approval. EnergyCo noted that it was very common for the acquisition of land to commence and conclude ahead of a project receiving planning approval.

- CRG member indicated that this process is causing a huge amount of anxiety to landholders.

EnergyCo responded that the timing of projects and the need to undertake property acquisition often causes stress to affected landowners and the community alike. EnergyCo has made available independent professionals that landowners and the community can contact to

help them deal with this anxiety and some providers are able to come to a property should that assist a landowner get the assistance they require. EnergyCo does not receive any information to do with who has called and/or the matters discussed. This is a discrete and confidential service.

- CRG member asked how far down the acquisition process EnergyCo went with the old route? EnergyCo indicated that two properties were purchased at the request of the landowners.

Item 7. General business, questions and updates

- Question was asked about how the CRG influenced the project?
EnergyCo advised since the project started in 2023, feedback from the community and CRG has been used to inform both the project design and, in particular, how we engage, rather than resulting in a single change. A few examples are below.

Project design and study area

- Community feedback on constraints within the preliminary study corridor contributed to updates and the announcement of the revised study corridor in March 2024.
- Further feedback from the community and CRG, along with ongoing consultation with the NSW RFS, helped inform the new study area announced in October 2025.

Engagement approach

- CRG feedback has directly shaped where and how we communicate - for example, we now include the Apsley Advocate and Aberdeen Whisper in our advertising campaigns after direct recommendations from CRG members.
- Members have also guided where we show up locally. Based on recommendations, we've attended events such as the Black Gully Festival, Aberdeen Highland Games and Armidale Show, and will be at the Upper Hunter Show today and tomorrow. We're also working with UNE and Sustainable Living Armidale on an upcoming forum on the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies.

Studies and consultation

- Following CRG feedback, the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) survey in 2025 was extended, and with your support in sharing it, responses increased to over 400 (about double the original number of responses).
- Some CRG members have also participated in SIA interviews, including yours, to inform the SIA, which will help us understand community values, concerns and potential impacts, including how impacts are assessed and how mitigation measures are developed.
- Feedback on the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies (RMIS) engagement has led to the CRG being invited to help inform the opportunities register of enabling infrastructure solutions (we'll discuss this more in our session today).
- CRG members were also invited to be involved in a working group to co-design a social risk analysis across REZs.

- More broadly, the CRG has played an important role in helping us understand what matters most to communities and shaping our engagement approach. To date, a key focus has been ensuring members are well informed so you can act as a conduit for your communities and provide feedback into the project.
- That said, we’ve heard the feedback that members would like more opportunities to influence outcomes. We are actively looking to build this in - for example, as we develop the engagement program for the Community and Employment Benefits Scheme, we will be seeking CRG input on how that program should be designed.
- CRG member asked whether the changes to the corridor were a result of community feedback. EnergyCo advised that community feedback was considered, however as previously advised the core reasons for the change to the study area were based on constructability, access and reducing impacts to fire fighting capabilities in the region.

Future meetings

- Next meeting proposed for Monday 15th June in Uralla.
- Meeting closed at 2.12pm.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
1	Commence the advertising process for CRG recruitment now to maximise opportunity to nominate.	M Maurer	
2	Share link for CRG membership application with CRG members.	M Maurer	
3	Include Community Employment Benefit Fund as a standing item for future meeting agendas.	Chair	

Upcoming meetings

Monday 15 June.