EnergyCo

Terms of reference

New England REZ Community Reference Group

May 2026

Overview

This document outlines the terms of reference for the community reference groups for the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) network infrastructure project (the project).

Two groups will be established for the following areas:

- North: representing communities within the New England REZ
- South: representing communities along the bulk corridor (connection between the REZ and Bayswater to the south in Muswellbrook).

The community reference groups are being established by EnergyCo to promote two-way engagement with local communities and key stakeholders during the delivery of the New England REZ network infrastructure project.

Purpose and objectives

The role of the community reference group is to provide an open forum for discussion between community representatives, key stakeholders and EnergyCo about the New England REZ network infrastructure project. Each community reference group will discuss matters relating to the planning and delivery of the project, as well as broader REZ issues.

The community reference groups aim to:

- establish good working relationships and promote information-sharing between EnergyCo, local community representatives and key stakeholders
- provide community reference group members with visibility of the project and enable them to share project information via their networks
- keep members informed about project activities, key milestones and opportunities to provide feedback
- provide an avenue for EnergyCo to seek community and stakeholder input on project matters

- allow community members to seek information from EnergyCo and provide feedback.

The community reference groups provide an advisory function, informing the decision-making of EnergyCo through a consultative role. The community reference groups are not a decision-making authority for EnergyCo and the project.

Participation

Each community reference group may include:

- An independent Chairperson appointed from the NSW Planning Independent Chairs approved list and one supporting staff member for administrative and operational duties
- Up to seven local community members and/or representatives from community or stakeholder groups
- Elected representative(s) of relevant local council(s) and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (one from each)
- Up to 16 (south) or 18 (north) members in total
- No more than 50% of members with direct landholder interests that could result in future financial gains or losses.

Local council staff and developers of renewable generators within the REZ will be invited to attend community reference group meetings as guest participants as required.

New England REZ project team

Meetings will be attended by EnergyCo project team representatives for the New England REZ, including but not limited to the Project Director, Communication and Engagement Lead, Environment and Planning Lead, Technical Lead or their nominated delegates.

Once appointed, the future network operator of the REZ network infrastructure project will participate in the community reference group as required.

Stakeholder representation

Should a participant be representing a group (e.g. Local Council, Aboriginal Land Council or stakeholder group), they must have the authority to represent that group and acknowledge that they are a member of the community reference group in that capacity, not in a personal capacity (i.e. they are authorised to speak on behalf of their representative group).

Attendance by non-CRG members

Members may ask the Chair to invite non-community reference group members/expert advisors to attend meetings to provide advice to the community reference groups. This may include representatives of state government agencies, technical experts or

consultants, community project partners or members of the public with expertise of value to the community reference groups.

Dissemination of meeting notes

All summary notes will be finalised by the independent Chair and/or support staff and will be made available on the New England REZ website.

Roles and responsibilities

Independent Chair

The independent Chair will act as the convenor, facilitator, mediator and advisor for the community reference groups. They will act independently and impartially and will be the key point of contact between the community reference groups and EnergyCo. The independent Chair will be appointed and remunerated by EnergyCo. The independent Chair is responsible for ensuring that issues raised by community reference group members on behalf of the community are properly considered.

Support staff

The independent Chair will have support staff

/s available to assist with the administration and management of each CRG. This includes general administrative tasks, group communications, venue booking/management, minute taking and other duties defined by the independent Chair.

Community representatives

Community and stakeholder representatives will be:

- Current residents and/or landowners in the project area, or a member of a community or stakeholder group with an interest in the New England REZ network infrastructure project
- Able to demonstrate involvement in local community groups and/or activities
- Aware of the REZ and related issues of concern to the local community
- Able to represent and communicate the interests of the local community
- Willing to adhere to the community reference group terms of reference, code of conduct and declaration of interests
- Willing to report back to the wider community on the activities of the community reference group
- Able to commit to a membership period of one year, after which time they will be required to renominate
- Able to attend at least 75 per cent of the quarterly meetings, which will be held in person, once a quarter throughout the year.

EnergyCo

During its participation in the community reference groups, EnergyCo will:

- Provide the community reference groups with timely and informative updates on the New England REZ, including the REZ network infrastructure project
- Share community information and documents with the community reference groups, including all publicly available project updates and reports. This does not include any information of a financial or commercial nature
- Keep the community reference groups informed about the status of environmental planning and assessment requirements and will notify the group when any applications are lodged with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Respond to any requests for information from the community reference group within 28 days unless otherwise agreed to with the group and specified in the summary notes
- Organise site visits for community reference group members where appropriate
- Adhere to all community reference group requirements including the terms of reference and code of conduct.

The New England REZ network infrastructure project network operator

Once a network operator is appointed to build and operate the REZ network infrastructure project, they will be responsible for participating in the community reference group meetings in accordance with the terms of reference.

Governance

Meeting frequency and times

Community reference group meetings will be held at least once per quarter, with the meeting dates and times to be agreed upon by the independent Chair and community reference group members. It is proposed that meetings should be held during daylight hours to prevent members travelling via road at dusk and in the evening.

Attendance

Members must attend at least 75% of meetings during their term. Members from organisations and groups may nominate a proxy member to attend on their behalf if they are unable to attend.

Any proxy member must be identified in the application form and be approved by EnergyCo. They must also agree to the Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct and behaviour standards, and declare any conflicts of interest to EnergyCo prior to participating.

Venue

Meetings will be held face-to-face in the region where practical. Due to the size of the project area, meetings can be held in local townships on a rotating basis to ensure equitable access for community reference group members. Video conferencing facilities will be provided where possible to allow members to attend meetings remotely.

Meeting documentation

The independent Chair will manage the alignment of a dedicated work program with key outcomes of the project. They will manage the preparation of this program, develop meeting agendas and summary notes in consultation with EnergyCo, and provide general administration support.

Documents will be distributed electronically via email. Members may propose a matter for inclusion on the agenda, either before or during a meeting, in consultation with the independent Chair, providing the matter is within the scope of the community reference group.

If any documents are provided for members to review along with the meeting agenda, these will be circulated at least one week before the meeting. Within one week of a meeting, the independent Chair or delegate will distribute draft summary notes to all community reference group members for review. Members have one week to provide their feedback to the independent Chair. Within two weeks of receiving this feedback, the independent Chair will finalise summary notes for publication on the EnergyCo website.

Guest attendees

Subject to approval from the independent Chair, non-community reference group members may be invited to join a meeting either as observers or to provide advice. This may include developers of renewable energy generation projects or stakeholder organisations with specific remits and expertise. Non-community reference group members would not participate in the business of the community reference group unless invited to do so by the independent Chair. Subject matter experts may be invited to attend community reference group meetings to provide technical expertise as required.

Extraordinary meetings

If there are important and urgent matters requiring consideration, any member of the community reference group may ask the independent Chair to convene an extraordinary meeting. The independent Chair will decide whether an extraordinary meeting is warranted, or whether the matters can be addressed in other ways.

Notice period

Members will be given at least four weeks' notice before a regular meeting and one weeks' notice before an extraordinary meeting.

Working groups

The community reference group/s may form sub-committees or working groups to address an issue if required.

Site visits

Site visits may be organised at the discretion of EnergyCo. If site visits are conducted, members agree to always take direction from project staff and agree to refrain from taking images and distributing images publicly through the media or social media without prior consent from EnergyCo.

Code of conduct

All members must sign a code of conduct agreement prior to joining the community reference group. The independent Chair will bring any breach of the code to the attention of the concerned party. This may take the form of a verbal warning during a meeting, which is formally recorded in the meeting notes, or a written warning following the meeting. The independent Chair or EnergyCo may replace a community reference group member at any time if they breach the code of conduct.

Standards of behaviour

As per the code of conduct, during meetings attendees are expected to:

- Show respect to fellow members and avoid unconstructive, threatening, or disorderly behaviour
- Refrain from conduct that could cause undue offense or embarrassment
- Follow good meeting practices, including accepting direction from the Chair
- Speak succinctly and ensure all members have an opportunity to be heard without interruption
- Consider all relevant information and viewpoints
- Maintain the confidentiality of any information shared within the group, with prior notice when confidentiality applies.

The Chair will oversee adherence to these standards and ensure any concerns raised by members are properly addressed.

Failure to adhere to the code of conduct and standards of behaviour may result in removal from the reference group.

Declaration of interests

All members of the community reference group must declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests to protect the integrity of the group and its members. This declaration must be kept up to date for the duration of membership. If a community reference group member has a direct or indirect interest in a matter being considered by the community reference group, and this interest conflicts with their ability to perform

their role with respect to the matter raised, the member must disclose the nature of the interest to the community reference group and in writing to the independent Chair as soon as possible. Details of any disclosure will be recorded in the meeting notes.

It should be noted that a pecuniary interest is an interest a person has in a matter because of a reasonable likelihood or expectation of appreciable financial gain or loss to the person. Money does not have to change hands for there to be a pecuniary interest.

Communication and media

Sharing information with the wider community

Community reference group members are encouraged to share project information with the wider community, subject to confidentiality/commercial in confidence requirements where appropriate. Only the Independent Chair may speak publicly on behalf of the community reference group/s.

Media and public comment

Community reference group members are not permitted to provide statements to the media on behalf of the community reference group/s.

If providing statements to the media, members should:

- Attribute comments, questions or answers to questions to themselves only
- Not claim to represent the community reference group, EnergyCo or the New England REZ network infrastructure project
- Inform the independent Chair of any engagement with the media in relation to a community reference group matter
- Obtain written consent before sharing any logos or intellectual property with the media that belongs to EnergyCo or any other affiliated organisation.

Publishing member contact details

Community reference group members' email addresses will be published on the project website so members of the community can contact them about community reference group matters. Phone numbers won't be published online unless agreed to by the community reference group.