New England Renewable Energy Zone Regional Steering Committee (SteerCo)

Meeting Minutes

17 June 2026 – 9.00am to 1.00pm

Location: UNE Smart Regional Incubator – NOVA Building, 122 Faulkner Street, Armidale

Co-Chair: Julian Watson, New England REZ Deputy Project Director, EnergyCo

Attended

Councils

Paul Bennett – Tamworth Regional Council

James Roncon – Armidale Regional Council

Mick Raby – Uralla Shire Council

Stephen Parry – Walcha Council

Bernard Smith – Glen Innes Severn Council

Sharon Pope – Muswellbrook Shire Council

State Agencies

Leanne Sharpe – TAFE NSW

Kate Ware – Department of Education

Simon Mould – Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

Emily Coles – Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Dane O'Connor – Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Holly Davies – Transport for NSW

Malcolm St Hill – NSW Premier's Department

EnergyCo

Mark Westbook (Chief Project Officer)

Georgina Franklin

Wayne Hillier

Julian Watson

Michael Burden

Andrew Kouros

Teresa Coletta

Justin Roach

Apologies

Barry McGrattan – EnergyCo

Brett McInnes – Inverell Shire Council

Matt Francisco – Tenterfield Shire Council

Lana Hall – Premiers Department

Erin Horn – DCCEEW

Ria Pryce – DCCEEW

Steve Cooper – Transport for NSW

Derek Finnigan – Muswellbrook Shire Council

Miaye Mon – Premiers Department

Panduka Manamperi – EnergyCo

Heather Wilson – NSW Environment Protection Authority

Darren Keegan – Investment NSW

Toni Avery – Uralla Shire Council

Greg McDonald – Upper Hunter Shire Council

Agenda item discussion and actions

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
1-3	Welcome to Country and opening meeting	EnergyCo and Uncle Steve Widders	
4	Inaugural SteerCo address	EnergyCo	EnergyCo's Chief Project Officer (CPO) welcomed participants to the inaugural Regional Steering Committee and reaffirmed the New England REZ's importance to NSW's renewable energy transition. The CPO: • acknowledged the strong foundations established through stakeholder engagement, regional planning, major infrastructure studies, engagement on infrastructure opportunities and council partnerships, and thanked councils, agencies and regional stakeholders for their contributions. • emphasised the need for a coordinated whole-of-government approach to address regional challenges and maximise long-term benefits through a shared vision, spirit of partnership and problem-solving attitude. • outlined the SteerCo's role in providing a strategic regional voice, strengthening collaboration, informing government decision-making and helping shape future investment priorities. • the CPO emphasised the importance of drawing on lessons from other REZs, the importance of maintaining a focused, prioritised approach as the program moves from planning to delivery, with construction activity expected to increase from 2028.
5	Participant introductions	EnergyCo	Each representative in the group introduced themselves, the organisation they represented and provided a brief statement on what role they saw their respective organisation adding value in the SteerCo.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
6	EnergyCo Co-Chair introduction	Co-Chair	The Co-Chair (EnergyCo) welcomed members to the inaugural SteerCo and outlined its role: • As a collaborative forum bringing together councils, government agencies and EnergyCo to address REZ-related challenges and opportunities. • Intention to complement existing forums by providing a coordinated regional voice into government decision-making, investment and advocacy processes. The Co-Chair highlighted the importance of the co-chair model with councils, the role of Project Groups in identifying and progressing priority initiatives, and the need to focus on key infrastructure challenges over the next one to two years. • Drawing on findings from the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies and engagement on infrastructure opportunities, noting that water security, availability and quality have emerged as the region's highest priorities. • The importance of collaboration and the SteerCo's role in supporting effective REZ delivery and long-term community outcomes across the New England region.
7	Regional infrastructure	EnergyCo	EnergyCo noted the following: • The importance of ensuring regional infrastructure supports the successful delivery of the renewable energy transition. This includes EnergyCo's collaborative, evidence-based approach to identifying and prioritising infrastructure opportunities across housing, water, waste, transport and logistics to enable REZ development and manage/mitigate community impacts. • Working closely with councils, government agencies and regional stakeholders, EnergyCo will assess and develop a pipeline of feasible projects that can be considered for future investment and co-funding opportunities. • The SteerCo plays an important role in providing local expertise, informing government decision-making and helping deliver long-term infrastructure outcomes that support both the renewable energy rollout and the future prosperity of the New England region.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed

8	Formal proceedings	EnergyCo	The SteerCo **RESOLVED** to:
			• Endorse Co-Chairs:
			  ○ General Manager, Uralla Shire Council; and
			  ○ EnergyCo: Deputy Project Director, New England Renewable Energy Zone
			• Endorse Terms of Reference version 0.2, subject to the action below in Item 10.

9	Break	All	Short comfort break.
10	Project Group discussions	EnergyCo	The SteerCo participants split into several groups to discuss what does success look like for a Project Group. The participants agreed that the following two Project Groups would be established as the initial priorities: 1. A working group to identify water policy levers that could help to enable REZ delivery and address challenges experienced by councils. The group will initially include (but isn't limited to) representatives from Tamworth Regional Council, Muswellbrook Shire Council, EnergyCo (Regional Infrastructure), and DCCEEW Water. 2. A Project Group that can clearly communicate to all the SteerCo participants the current gaps, limitations, constraints and impacts of lack of certainty around generator development pipeline datasets, and identification of opportunities to address that in order to facilitate increased planning and coordination across government and councils. The group will include: EnergyCo and others tbc. Action: EnergyCo will assist with the initial creation of the two proposed Project Groups and seek nominations for the appropriate leads and participants. Action: Terms of Reference to be updated to replace references of Project Groups to Working Groups and re-distributed.
11	Any other business	EnergyCo	The next Regional Steering Committee is targeted for week commencing 14 September 2026, with the venue to be determined. SteerCo participants to provide suggested agenda items in advance of the meeting. Action: SteerCo participants to provide suggested agenda items for the next meeting to the Secretariat no later than 31 July 2026.
12	Wrap up and close	Co-Chair	The Co-Chair thanked all participants for their contribution to the discussions.

Actions

Ref	Action	Responsible	Due
RSC-01-001	EnergyCo will assist with the initial creation of the two proposed Project Groups and seek nominations for the appropriate leads and participants.	EnergyCo	3/7/26
RSC-01-002	Terms of Reference to be updated to replace references of Project Groups to Working Groups and re-distributed.	EnergyCo	3/7/26
RSC-01-003	SteerCo participants to provide suggested agenda items for the next meeting to the Secretariat no later than 31 July 2026.	All	31/7/26