Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone Community Reference Group Inaugural meeting

ILW REZ CRG

Held on: 31 August 2026 – 5:00pm to 7:00pm

At: The Chambers, Wollongong Art Gallery

Chaired by: Adam Zarth, Independent Chair and David Petrie, Independent Deputy Chair

Attended

Chantel Carr, Keira Chair in Energy Futures, University of Wollongong

Ty Christopher, Director, Energy Futures Network, University of Wollongong

Jagdeep Singh, Independent Technology Advisor and Non-Executive Director, Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra

Madeleine Holme, Community Engagement Lead, Rewiring Australia

Greg Knight, Convenor, Illawarra Region Branch, Renew Illawarra

Coralie McCarthy, Director, Business Illawarra

Michael Rix, Acting President, Electrify Illawarra

Chris Newbold, Organiser, The Australian Workers' Union

Paul Anthony, Electrical Engineer, Renewable Energy Infrastructure Designer, i3net member and community representative

Simon Kersten, Managing Director, Colliers Wollongong

Luke Musgrave, Manager City Strategy, Wollongong City Council

Darryl Best, Board Director, Hi Neighbour

Shannon Chisholm, Chartered Professional Environmental Engineer, Equilibria Management Group

Michael Park, Executive Director Planning and Environment, Shellharbour City Council

Hon. Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and Member for Wollongong

Darren Clarke, Director, Planning, Environment and Sustainability, EnergyCo

Lym Garratt, Manager, Illawarra Regional Coordination, EnergyCo

Josh Peters, Project Officer, Illawarra Regional Coordination, EnergyCo

Charlie Wilson, Project Lead, Illawarra REZ, EnergyCo

Apologies

Nil

Declarations of interest

Nil declared.

Agenda item discussion and actions

Item 1. Acknowledgement of Country

- EnergyCo welcomed everyone to the inaugural Community Reference Group (CRG) meeting and acknowledged the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country and paid respects to Elders past and present.

Item 2. Opening remarks

- The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, welcomed members and provided opening remarks for the inaugural meeting. He encouraged EnergyCo to facilitate future CRG briefings from relevant representatives of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, including on how the Illawarra REZ interacts with the draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Plan.

Item 3. Introductions

- The Independent Chair, Independent Deputy Chair and CRG members introduced themselves and outlined their experience, interests and expectations for the CRG.
- Members noted that the Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) boundary does not represent the entire Illawarra and suggested the Shoalhaven should be considered in future discussions.
- Energy equity was identified as important emerging considerations as the energy transition progresses.
- Members emphasised the importance of clear, accurate information and avoiding misinformation, drawing on the experience of community discussion about offshore wind.

Item 4. Welcome from EnergyCo

- EnergyCo welcomed members and outlined how community reference groups in other REZs have informed planning and decision making. Examples were provided of how community

feedback has helped to minimise impacts and enhance regional benefits associated with EnergyCo projects and initiatives.

Item 5. CRG and Illawarra REZ overview

- EnergyCo outlined the purpose of the CRG, the roles of members and EnergyCo, expected outputs and proposed ways of working.
- An overview of the Illawarra REZ was provided, including the current work program, strategic context, regional opportunities and potential focus areas that would benefit from CRG insights and feedback.

Item 6. CRG forward plan and discussion

- The Independent Chair proposed that future meetings include a presentation on a selected project or topic supported by a prioritised list of subjects for the CRG's forward work program.
- A CRG memberasked whether EnergyCo has a roadmap to guide its objectives and activities. EnergyCo proposed a future meeting include a briefing on the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.
- Members sought clarity about what information could be shared with the community and whether member names would be published. EnergyCo emphasised the value of open and frank discussion and transparency. Members were encouraged to engage with their communities so that community concerns and ideas could be represented in CRG discussions. Members were also encouraged to speak with the Independent Chair or Independent Deputy Chair before engaging with the media about matters discussed by the CRG.
- The group discussed governance arrangements, meeting protocols, declarations of interest, communications and the future meeting schedule.
- No declarations of interest were recorded at the meeting.

Item 7. Actions, decisions and next steps

- The proposed format for future meetings was a presentation followed by questions and answers, updates on key regional projects and discussion of member priorities.
- Members noted that the concept and purpose of a REZ are not widely understood. Clear, accessible communication, including communication for culturally and linguistically diverse communities was identified as a priority.

- Members discussed establishing a subgroup to explore community energy resources and energy equity, with the possibility of preparing advice for government.
- Members discussed the need for practical energy literacy, including simple explanations of household solar, bidirectional electricity flows, exports to the grid and how benefits can be shared between households that can and cannot afford energy technology.
- Data centres, their potential electricity demand and regional impact were proposed as a future discussion topic.
- EnergyCo noted that the CRG's advice on energy literacy and energy equity would add weight to issues already being considered and could inform future initiatives.
- Members suggested that the next meeting consider how the CRG could work together effectively, including parameters for establishing subgroups and holding early discussions between meetings.
- The Independent Chair and Independent Deputy Chair proposed that the next meeting also provide an opportunity for members to share information about projects and initiatives occurring across the region.
- Members requested further discussion of EnergyCo's overall philosophy and objectives for the Illawarra REZ, as well as supply chain resilience and reliance on overseas proponents and technology.
- The Independent Chair and Independent Deputy Chair will provide an update to members between meetings including next steps and proposed arrangements for the next meeting.

Item 8. Close

- The Independent Chair, Independent Deputy Chair and EnergyCo thanked members for their participation and closed the meeting at 7:00pm.

Actions

Action	Responsible	Status
Arrange a briefing for the CRG on the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.	EnergyCo	Open

Action	Responsible	Status
Clarify communication protocols including media engagement, publication of member names and what members may share with their communities.	Independent Chair, Independent Deputy Chair and EnergyCo	Open
Provide clarification and guidance on establishing CRG subgroups and holding discussions between meetings.	Independent Chair and Independent Deputy Chair	Open
Prepare and circulate a proposal for the structure and priority topics of future CRG meetings.	Independent Chair and Independent Deputy Chair	Open
Circulate an update between meetings, including next steps and arrangements for the next meeting.	Independent Chair and Independent Deputy Chair	Open
Investigate the potential to deliver a shared platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams) for members to communicate with one another between meetings.	EnergyCo	Open

Other comments

Future topics proposed by members included the geographic boundary of the Illawarra REZ, energy equity, energy literacy, community energy resources, data centre demand, regional projects, supply chain resilience and EnergyCo's objectives for the REZ.

Upcoming meetings

Date, time and location to be confirmed.