New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Community Reference Group (CRG) South – Meeting #8

Held on: 9/09/2026 – 4pm to 6.30 pm

Location: STEM Innovation Lab, Donald Horne Building, 140 Bridge Street, Muswellbrook

Chaired by: Margaret Harvie

Attended

Role	Attendee
Chairperson	Margaret Harvie
Community Representatives	Brigitte Thomas Kate Whitehead
LALC Representatives	Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council – Noel Downs
LGA delegates	Muswellbrook Shire Council – Cr Jeff Drayton (Mayor)
EnergyCo Representatives	Damien Wilson, New England REZ Associate Director, Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Cleo Andrews, New England REZ Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Lead* Laura Hoffman, New England REZ Biodiversity Lead Emily Speers Mears, Network Recommendations Director* Leanne Thompson, New England REZ Senior First Nations Advisor Melissa Maurer, New England REZ Community Engagement Manager
Guests	Kelly Carbery, Manager Strategic Projects, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) Michelle Kirkman, DCCEEW
Note taker	Kate McGrath

*Online attendance

Apologies

Michael McNelis, Vicki French, Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council – De-anne Douglas OAM, Upper Hunter Shire Council – Cr Adam Williamson.

Declarations of interest

Member	Details
Kate Whitehead	Pecuniary interest: Assisting Upper Hunter Shire Council (UHSC) in communications with EnergyCo regarding the NE REZ Project, including reviewing policy documents and legislation and preparing necessary submissions to EnergyCo for UHSC. Pecuniary interest: Acting for Upper Hunter Shire Council in relation to the Maizewood Battery Energy Storage System Project at Aberdeen, NSW. Potentially acting for a landholder in negotiations with a Turnbull Renewables entity in relation to the proposed Scott Creek Windfarm located at Willow Tree, NSW.
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

Item 1. Welcome & Acknowledgement of Country

- Chair acknowledged that we are meeting on Aboriginal land and paid respect to Elders past, present and emerging.
- Apologies noted.
- Introductions around the room.
- Overview of the agenda including noting the interest in the Consumer Trustee item that needed to be held over to next session or online session.

- CRG member asked about the absence of the two members who withdrew two meetings ago. Discussion about the importance that community voices are at the table. Important community voices that the CRG members want to hear from are missing from around the table.
- CRG member noted that community members are outnumbered by EnergyCo reps in this meeting. They said if members are in the CRG, they should not refuse to attend.
- Chair explained that there is already one vacancy, which will be 3 if those members choose not to continue.
- Chair asked for CRG member support to write to Allison McPhee and Valley Alliance giving them two weeks to confirm if they would like to continue. If they choose not to continue, Chair will recommend EnergyCo recruit 3 new members.
- CRG members agreed on proposed approach to membership.
- CRG members requested calendar invites are issued for future meetings.

Action: Chair to write to the members who withdrew to ask if they intend to return to the CRG. Based on the response EnergyCo to recruit for the three community representative positions.

Action: When CRG vacancy recruitment starts, EnergyCo will share advertisement for members to share on their channels.

Action: Chair to send calendar invitations for future meetings.

- Noting of actions

#	Action	Responsible	Status
1	Clarify ability for Muswellbrook Council to receive access scheme fees or like benefits from projects within the LGA which connect to the CWO REZ of which Muswellbrook is not a part.	J Watson	**In progress.** Update to be provided.
2	Provide CRG members with a link to the INSW consultation paper on data centres.		**Completed.** Link was shared as part of distributed meeting notes.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
3	Property access agreements are to be established on Crown Lands with the relevant LALCs.	D Taylor	**EnergyCo response:** EnergyCo consults with relevant Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) as part of its usual engagement processes. EnergyCo will consult with relevant LALCs, NSW Crown Lands and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council as appropriate regarding any proposed access or acquisition involving Crown Land to ensure this is undertaken in a culturally respectful way. For example, through the Port to REZ program EnergyCo is currently working with NSW Crown Lands and NSW Aboriginal Land Council on a proposed road extension near Uralla involving Crown Land.
4	Information about the access and studies conducted to date on Crown Land that is subject to native title claims is to be shared with the relevant LALCs.	J Watson	**In progress.** Site Management team is currently confirming if any studies have been completed on Crown Land that is subject to native title claims.
5	Inform Upper Hunter Shire Council representative of planned approach to pest and animal management at EnergyCo property at Timor.		**Completed.** Update provided to representative by phone on 30 Jun.
6	Find out why Scone, Muswellbrook and Tamworth TAFE aren't being offered funding for training.	J Watson	**In progress.** Update to be provided.
7	EnergyCo to design and schedule a CRG meeting / workshop regarding enabling infrastructure opportunities.	J Watson	**Completed.** Discussed during June 2026 meeting. Members to advise if they wish to provide further comments and if so, this will be facilitated.

#	Action	Responsible	Status
8	Share Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) First Nations Guidelines once finalised.	L Thompson	To be actioned once finalised.

Item 2. Project updates

- Presented by Damien Wilson, New England REZ Associate Director, Community and Stakeholder Engagement.
- Damien is taking over Julian's role in regularly providing project updates to the CRG.
- Busy time for the project and focussed effort in preparing for the EIS and public exhibition.
- Recent engagement activity has included Community & Employment Benefit Program (CEBP) sessions along the corridor with councils, community and Aboriginal stakeholders.
- CEBP surveys are open until 18 September. He encouraged everyone to complete survey.
- REZ declaration consultation underway.
- Draft Access Scheme consultation closed in early August. Webinars available on the website. An update on the outcomes will be provided in due course.
- Completed an aerial survey of alignment last week. Originally this was planned for mid-year and was rescheduled to September in response to feedback. Landowners were notified in advance and the survey was adapted to minimise impact. No complaints or negative outcomes advised to EnergyCo.
- Community needs and priorities survey report was published on EnergyCo's website and a link has been provided to CRG members directly.
- Worked with Infrastructure NSW on a Health Check covering project status and progress.
- Commenced early engagement with landholders about proposed workforce accommodation sites to ensure awareness and inform planning prior to EIS exhibition later in the year. Information about the sites will be provided in the EIS and feedback invited. Concerns will be considered and addressed through the EIS and ongoing engagement with those neighbours. Noted that plans for the sites and how they would operate are developing and a FAQ is available on the project website.
- Announced deferral of northern connection - a 13km section in the northern section of the project corridor near Boorolong. National energy system planning determined it isn't needed

now to meet transmission capacity requirements. Advised landowners and councils in that section of corridor of the deferral.

- Discussions with landowners about technical design and working through individual feedback is ongoing.
- EIS is an important milestone and keen to get it out to community and stakeholders for comment. Working with Department of Planning to have documents prepared for exhibition. The draft EIS is currently undergoing an adequacy review to check if documents meet requirements.
- Out and about in community to provide an opportunity to meet the team and ask questions, including 9 mobile offices for small-scale drop-in sessions across the alignment and attendance at several recent community events
- Public exhibition of the EIS will be supported through advertising, landowner presentations, and community roadshows (information sessions). Plan to run a series of webinars on key topics. Purpose is to give people as much information as possible in that period to have them understand the EIS and the process to ensure submissions are effective in addressing the community issues. Open to ideas for how best to provide community with opportunity to speak to us about the EIS, recognising that some people in the community don't have access to internet.
- Acquisition process. The first group of landowners, between Bayswater and the Central Hub and through to the East Hub, have been contacted ahead of the formal acquisition process. Pre-acquisition meeting has been offered to explain process. Start sending out formal letters over the next few weeks. Each landowner is allocated a dedicated acquisition manager alongside their place manager to help understand and navigate the acquisition process and how it will impact them and their property.
- EnergyCo will be present at Thunderbolt Festival and Black Gully Festival community events.
- CRG member referred to information presented in the slide deck and asked for clarification about the location for opening letters referred to as Central and East Hub.

  Response from EnergyCo that it refers to the corridor between central hub across to east hub
- CRG question about whether it is compulsory acquisition?

  EnergyCo response that the aim is to come to agreement, it is the start of the process, it is one of the formal steps that must take place prior to any compulsory acquisition.
- CRG question asking if the biodiversity studies have been completed?

  Response from EnergyCo - yes, where there has been voluntary access to land provided.

CRG member suggested that the EIS should not be submitted until biodiversity studies have been completed or else it is just ticking boxes. He suggested that he has seen mining companies do it too many times including the draining of a dam in Singleton that led to the death of 5000 turtles.

Response from EnergyCo that surveys for inclusion in the EIS were completed as of March. Any survey work carried out after March 2026 will be incorporated into a Revised Biodiversity Development Assessment Report, that will be appended to an Amendment Report that would assess any project changes made after exhibition of the EIS. The Amendment Report would be submitted to DPHI alongside the Response to Submission Report. Surveys will also be carried out on all land before construction as a requirement of the Biodiversity Management Plan.

- CRG question asking to get copies of the surveys instead of having to wait until the very end, noting it is easier to work through a few at a time?

  Response from EnergyCo that there is opportunity for a briefing and the discussion of specific areas, we have to date provided landholders the results for their own properties.

  CRG response that Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council would like the studies presented.

  EnergyCo indicated that there is a wealth of data, if there is a particular area where information is required we can look to see if there is a way to provide that information.

  CRG member indicated that there is a particular area of interest.

Action: Noel to email Laura a shape file of the area that Nungaroo LALC are interested in having biodiversity study information for.

Item 3. Strategic Offsets Delivery Agreements (SODAs) and Conservation Investment Strategy

- Presented by Kelly Carbery, Manager Strategic Projects NSW DCCEEW
- Focus on NEREZ but acknowledge that there is overlap with Hunter REZ.
- The renewable energy transition is an opportunity to better coordinate and direct investment from biodiversity offsetting for development occurring in renewable energy zones.
- Developed a framework to ensure that investment is delivering like for like biodiversity offsets but also achieving strategic outcomes for a region.
- Framework consists of two parts:
  - Strategic Offset Delivery Agreement - a formal agreement with renewable energy proponents that transfers the offset obligation to the Department and allows proponents to focus on construction and project development.

  - Conservation investment strategies – identifies priority conservation areas and actions to guide offset delivery under SODAs and promote better integration of conservation investment in a region
- Opportunity to think bigger than offsets and consider the conservation needs of the zone to maximise outcomes from this generational investment into biodiversity.
- Opportunity to ensure complementary investment across conservation programs and work in partnership with landholders, First Nations people and communities to deliver outcomes.
- Principles to organise and guide design of strategies are reflected in the regulation.
- Process for development of the strategy:
  - Identify key conservation assets such as protected areas, threatened species and ecological communities, waterways, wetlands, large intact remnants of native vegetation
  - Identify key threats such as weeds, feral animals and die-back
  - Analyse spatial data e.g. species habitat suitability modelling (over 80 threatened species), threatened ecological community mapping, connectivity, data on how comprehensive adequate and representative the protected area system is, data reflecting condition of native vegetation and where benefits can be achieved by protecting or restoring remnants.
  - Output of spatial analysis provides an emerging picture of areas with most to offer for conservation, to help inform priorities.
  - Consultation e.g. with other conservation program areas, LLS, councils and community to identify local values and inform priority areas for protection and restoration. In the New England a biodiversity reference group provided local information on important conservation values and priorities
- Draft strategy is close to publication.
- Map will show the priority investment areas. Will indicate specific areas of focus and outcomes, e.g. corridors going east to west to re-establish connection through cleared areas, opportunity for north south linkages and to improve protection on the western side of the REZ, important habitat areas for regent honey eater and koalas, areas of vegetation that are species rich including species which may or may not be threatened, unique ecosystems to be protected and enhanced.
- Recognise investment in this area in on farm nature repair, building on decades of investment in biodiversity on farms.
- Implementation:

- biodiversity offsetting, through SODAs and encouraging other proponents to align offsetting delivery with this strategy
- Working with other government partners to better coordinate investment decisions
- Opportunities for landholders through private land conservation programs or participating in credit supply for offsets

Strategic Offsets Delivery Agreements (SODA) overview - Project meets obligation on signing, department have 3 years to fulfil through retirement of like for like credits or, if credits are unavailable, targeted conservation actions, consistent with the conservation investment strategy. SODA must deliver equivalent or better outcomes.

- Source credits through acquiring land to create biodiversity credits or landowners supplying credits through reverse auction processes which are transparent and open mechanisms. Stewardship Support Program supports landowners by providing free biodiversity assessments to successful landowners to develop credit supply in advance. Conservation actions, where required, will be developed and delivered in partnerships.
- There is a high degree of transparency in SODAs, they are published on a register, and reports provided every quarter on progress and expenditure.
- New England transmission line is in planning, cannot enter into SODAs until a project has been approved, but preparation for offset delivery underway.
- EOI process for the Stewardship Support Program is open at the moment, closing soon but will reopen periodically.
- Publishing New England strategy soon, hoping for October.
- Will reexamine the Hunter strategic plan which is due for annual review in October.
- CRG question about what happens if there's not enough funding for biodiversity requirements? An amount is set aside but they haven't finished all the studies?

  DCCEEW response that the amount is yet to be decided because offset obligations aren't determined. The credit obligation will be re-calculated for impacts outlined in the Revised Biodiversity Development Assessment Report that accompanies the Amendment Report (due in 2027); this will also include more survey results, calculate the impacts of any design changes since EIS exhibition.
- CRG asked how can public keep track of like for like in biodiversity offsets and migration patterns in the region, instead of 1500kms away?

  DCCEEW response that a feature of the Conservation Investment Strategies is that offsetting within the region is prioritised. The quarterly report shows progress on offset delivery for each

credit type and includes some contextual information on the outcomes the offsets are contributing to. CWO is a good example with case studies for properties providing credits and what offsets are being delivered. DCCEEW will continue to communicate what the outcomes look like.

- CRG question asking do DCCEEW take the biodiversity studies at face value or does someone independently check that they are accurate?

  EnergyCo response is that the biodiversity studies are prepared by Accredited Assessors, accredited by DCCEEW.

- CRG comment if you are managing the offsets and the studies are not accurate then we may not be getting what we need to replace like-for-like.

  EnergyCo response that there's reliability and accuracy of the studies, the study is prepared by an accredited assessor, there are places we haven't had access and we have taken a precautionary approach and have assumed all threated species are there. All methods and assessment approached have been determined in consultation with DCCEEW. It's likely to be an over-estimate of biodiversity values. Requirement of biodiversity assessment is to focus on threatened species and ecological communities, so common or non-threatened species are not specifically assessed. However, mitigation measures targeted threatened species will also address non-threatened species.

- CRG response that if you don't know what's there then species will be impacted simply because no one knows they are there, we can at least pick and choose to avoid breeding seasons and minimise destruction of living creatures, it isn't a big ask, only protecting the part at risk only puts more species at risk.

  EnergyCo response: There are pre-construction surveys that happen and salvage and rescue before construction, and at that point all are treated the same way whether they are threatened or not, under the flora fauna management plan we have to check hollows and survey trees and check nests and this involves relocation.

  CRG response that a mining project destroyed 5000 turtles.

  EnergyCo response that we don't want to see an incident like this and the Network Operator will be required to notify all relevant people (including wildlife carers, vets), in advance of clearing activities. The Biodiversity Management Plan will have all pre-clearing requirements in it, including dam-dewatering procedures if required.

  CRG comment that they often hear 'never again', but we see it happen time after time.

- Chair explained DCCEEW accredit, not DPHI.
- CRG concern there are some spots too difficult to reach so they just aren't surveyed.

- CRG comment that in report of 10km of bushland there were 30 different species of birds recorded, in his 50 acres there are over 300 species of birds.
- CRG asked which experts are involved in the migration mitigation strategy.

  DCCEEW asked to clarify if this is during construction.

  CRG response that if you are setting aside areas for offsets in existing biodiversity they can migrate to. Planting of new habitat for displaced creatures, and who is advising on that?

  Response that accredited assessors identify what biodiversity values are in an offset area (i.e Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement site) and what can be achieved through management of that area. Sometimes restoration ecologists get involved to develop these plans and guide how the land is managed. They are monitored every year, and it must be demonstrated that management actions have been fulfilled to the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (i.e. management actions are annually audited). Landholders get paid to undertake the actions and payment is not released until the actions have been undertaken. This is well monitored to ensure the gains are being achieved. If you're thinking about location and where the properties are, that is part of the conservation investments strategies.
- CRG member showed interest in seeing what the offsets opportunities are, especially within the LALC boundary, to ensure they are in the near vicinity of any destruction.

  EnergyCo response that we don't have that level of detail yet, but the amount set aside will always be more than what is impacted.

  CRG question about whether some are credits for existing and some are for planting new habitat?

  DCCEEW response yes there can be, you can get credits for improving existing vegetation and restoration, including planting new vegetation and habitat.
- CRG comment that they would like to see far more restoration work, otherwise you are just shuffling the cards.

  DCCEEW response that the system works on gain, so there also must be improvement in ecological condition and we are keen to encourage further restoration.
- CRG comment that the line passes through the Nundle State Forest and Forestry Corporation of NSW may be worth talking to for restoration.
- CRG comment trying to understand what this project's impacted area is compared to a coal mine, the Mt Arthur mine is 14000ha, this puts it in perspective about how much land is actually being cleared.

EnergyCo responded that the disturbance area figures will be in the EIS and encompasses area of works, powerlines, etc it's the whole landscape not just the areas being cleared.

CRG response that the mines don't disturb it all either, but it's still included.

- CRG comment asking if credit supply is limited to impacted landholders.

  DCCEEW response no and anyone can apply to the Stewardship Support Program and there will be an evaluation process to determine whether the values on the property align with credit demand.

- CRG further question about whether they need to be within the REZ?

  DCCEEW response yes, or in proximity such as within the buffer area identified in the strategy.

Item 4. Break

- 5.15pm to 5.25pm

Item 5. Consultation on the proposed New England REZ Declaration Amendment

- Presented by Emily Speers Mears, Network Recommendations Director
- Consultation is currently open on the amendment of the REZ declaration for New England REZ. The amendment is an update to specify the network infrastructure proposed. Since the New England REZ Declaration was made in 2021, EnergyCo has progressed project development, meaning we can now update the Declaration to set out at a high level the scope of the infrastructure. The proposed amendments to the Declaration are needed to progress the access scheme declaration and develop an infrastructure planner recommendation report for consumer trustee authorisation.
- EnergyCo has received some excellent questions and input on the declaration amendment to date.
- The proposed amendment doesn't pre-empt any planning or approval process or secure approval of the EIS, it is about being clear on the high-level scope of infrastructure being proposed.
- Questions have reflected community concern that this bypasses these approval process, but for authorisation, the REZ declaration amendment is needed before EnergyCo can start the approval process.
- The proposed changes were set out in the presentation slide.
- EnergyCo has received questions about whether the scope can change after the REZ Declaration is amended or if the REZ Declaration amendment locks the scope in. The scope can still change. The network infrastructure specified in the proposed REZ Declaration is high

level and is intended to capture only at a high level to allow minor amendments to the scope within it. Significant changes to scope would require further amendment of the declaration.

- The proposed REZ Declaration amendment includes infrastructure outside of the REZ boundary: the transmission line down to Bayswater and associated infrastructure, as this is part of the NE REZ network infrastructure scope required for approval and authorisation from the consumer trustee.
- CRG question whether the NE REZ scope will continue to deliver 8GW now that northern extension has been removed from the scope. Do the changes to the REZ declaration allow for the 8GW to be maintained?

  EnergyCo response that REZ declaration specifies transfer capacity of 8GW, which is larger than current proposed scope for the current New England REZ network infrastructure project, which is 6GW. There is the potential for a future stage that could deliver the 8GW (cumulative).
- The northern connection is listed within the proposed declaration amendment, the change to remove the northern connection was made after the consultation draft had been finalised. EnergyCo is considering whether it may remain in the amended REZ declaration or be subject to future amendment depending on future approval.
- CRG comment that Muswellbrook impact is based on the transmission lines and the investment decisions are about the capacity of the lines, particularly now when both state and federal government are pushing data centres to regional areas and requiring them to have their own energy, so it's important that these lines still have the capacity to model the decision making.

  EnergyCo response that northern line was to mesh into existing network, and splitting Central Hub into A and B unlocks the potential without changing the capacity.
- Feedback was encouraged on amendment and any other issues that should be considered before finalisation.
- CRG comment that they have already lodged a submission in response to the invitation. In Upper Hunter the amendment doesn't address the flow of funding to this end, which is impacted but not in the REZ due to inconsistency of definitions in the Electricity Infrastructure Amendment Act. It's defined in the geographical area of the REZ and although the REZ declaration alters the declaration to include transmission area in the access scheme there's still incongruence in the Act. Though they can tap into the line and this generates funding for communities.

  EnergyCo response that this is good feedback and will be covered in part in the CEBP segment of the meeting.

- CRG comment that there isn't a clear definition about what the Act defines as an access area as opposed to an access network. Provision for minister to declare areas as access areas instead of part of access network, it seems like a separate provision that could provide for excluded townships.

  EnergyCo response that this will be taken on notice.

Action: Clarify what the Act defines as an access area as opposed to an access network.

- CRG member asked is the infrastructure EnergyCo's or the developers.

  EnergyCo response that the future network operator will deliver, operate and maintain the infrastructure. EnergyCo would remain in a governance role.

- CRG ask if the Network Operator are on board.

  EnergyCo response - not yet. Network Operator proponents have been shortlisted to three.

Item 6. CRG Member Updates

- People are horrified by the destruction in CWO it looks like they've gone along the entire width of the corridor with a dozer.

  EnergyCo acknowledged that vegetation clearing may be confronting, but there are processes to assess, avoid, minimise and mitigate impacts.

- CRG member said that an Aboriginal ranger stated they felt sick seeing it.

- CRG comment that they felt that it's meant to be about climate change, but it's actually just destruction. Comment that it's more destructive than the bushfires, as there is no warning for the animals.

  Chair suggested a future presentation about the construction management plan process.

- CRG member said that it's well and good to have a plan, but they aren't following it.

  EnergyCo noted concerns about construction impacts at CWO, and suggested that these may be addressed at a future meeting by that project team, including any outcomes of the investigations, preventative measures and lessons learned.

Action: Request that EnergyCo arrange representation at an upcoming CRG meeting to discuss CWO incident.

- CRG member indicated that we need a plan for how to avoid similar incidents in the New England REZ.

  EnergyCo response that ongoing biodiversity management is always improving as is the process in preparing plans and delivering on the ground.

- CRG believed that there was trimming planned (in CWO), and the bulldozing of trees is not trimming.

  EnergyCo response that there will be areas where all vegetation must be removed, and LIDAR imagery shows where the vegetation is and how tall it is. Where the towers are and where the lines sag there needs to be a clearance buffer between lowest point of the line and the vegetation. Trees encroaching into the buffer must be removed. Ground layer and shrubs can be retained in some areas. Variable clearing methods will be used in different places.

- CRG member request for LIDAR information on Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council area to be provided.

Action: EnergyCo to investigate whether Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council can be provided with LIDAR information.

- EnergyCo response that the scale of impact and the proposed mitigation will be in the EIS and the condition and controls imposed will determine the binding conditions of consent. Briefings for management and compliance of EIS and biodiversity can be arranged and feedback about what should be included is welcomed.

  EnergyCo noted that LALC being in the RAP group provides the means to include concerns in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report.

- CRG response that desecration of site is part of the concern, but biodiversity is the other part.

- CRG member concern about project status and certainty. Muswellbrook has attracted billions of dollars of investment interest. The coalition announcement that the REZ may be cancelled and legal action is creating uncertainty. We're about to see Mt Pleasant and Bengalla extend their mines, they'll clear twice the area and we won't see the same negative reaction, we'll see support. I can see that people will be affected, but the mines are built on land that was privately owned, none of it was government, and a lot of it was bought out below market rate. It's just a different view, and we'll see 12,000 jobs lost between now and 2030 and we need some certainty. This is the issue in Muswellbrook. Our shire won't have clearing really, but the view is that while this is getting built, twice the amount of land will be cleared for two mine expansions.

- CRG member comment that there is general unhappiness about all aspects of the process. Comment that people are unhappy because of acquisition, access, 83 truck movements a day, landscape will be ruined.

- Council representative response to offer a discussion about specific impacts and concerns.
- EnergyCo also offered to facilitate a meeting between the CRG member and their dedicated project contact to discuss project impacts specific to their property.
- CRG comment that it is important that the views of all the community are heard.
- CRG member commented that EnergyCo doesn't listen and nothing changes, they just do what they want.
- CRG comment that a concern is losing a portion of productive farm to the REZ and that will limit spraying and other activity in the area and that the compensation won't cover the losses over the life of the REZ.

  EnergyCo response that comment can't be made on specific landholder's situation, there will be impact, and there is a mandated process that needs to be followed. There is a conversation to be had about mitigation for specific impacts and issues, and consideration of what can be done.
- CRG member commented that devalued properties cut into the retirement funds.
- CRG comment that there is so much information and it has been so politicised.
- CRG comment that the energy proponents are all the same and follow the same playbook.
- CRG comment that council work hard to get good outcomes, such as road recategorization which will save money, changes of routes and other great outcomes.
- CRG comment that Muscle Creek Rd and Beggary Creek roads are being used and aren't fit for movement.
- CRG response that council will include road upgrades requested as part of the conditions of consent, including the use of the road, payment, etc
- CRG response that projects will be stopped if they do not comply with conditions of consent and Council advocate to the state to enforce this compliance.
- CRG comment that McCully's Gap meetings with EnergyCo have occurred.
- CRG comment that there are impacts of Bowman's Creek windfarm and transmission line being in the same area.
- CRG comment that there is so much uncertainty with the political and legal elements. The sensationalising of it all creates uncertainty in the community. There are already two industries with different objectives that learned to coexist, there's now this alien imposing on what was a reasonable state of equilibrium.

- CRG comment that cost of living also a concern, community need to see where the benefit is.

Item 7. First Nations engagement update

- Presented by Leanne Thompson New England REZ Senior First Nations Advisor.
- Leanne has joined communities to discuss CEBP and provide a project overview in Tingha, Guyra, Glen Innes, Armidale, Uralla, Tamworth, Quirindi, and Muswellbrook.
- We heard a range of priorities with cultural connection and practice being the first priority. Interconnecting priorities include housing and social health and wellbeing and improving services.
- Differences between remote versus regional centres, and services funded in central areas not being adequate for more remote communities.
- Priorities include culture, language and heritage; Elders and aged care; education, youth and community development.
- Communities need somewhere to gather for funerals, community programs and practice of culture and connections.
- Communities were asked how the funding should be distributed, and they want Aboriginal people at the table making the decision and want to see fairness and equity.
- Two formal workshops are planned for the 16 September, one in Tamworth and one in Armidale.

Item 8. Community and Employment Benefits Scheme (CEBP) update

- Distribution of funds is primarily funded through Access Fees paid by generators connecting to the infrastructure.
- There has been a change in the regulation to enable funding from other sources, including network operator contributions, which has allowed the $60 million to be brought forward and distributed before construction starts.
- Upper Hunter is eligible to benefit under the program; changes have broadened where it can be spent and the sources that can be used. Previously it was very specific about just being within the boundary and then included intersection with boundary, now there is other funding that can be used for communities located close to the infrastructure.
- CRG question asking if this requires a legislative change?

EnergyCo response that this happened in March and more detail can be provided to members.

Action: EnergyCo to send info about change to legislation regarding CEBP distribution.

- Chair noted that the issue of funding to this lower area of the REZ has been raised by other members unable to attend this meeting.
- CRG comment that it will be difficult to see how it can be distributed and how will a small community get access - how will it be distributed and what for?

  EnergyCo response that the survey will inform the design, including how funds are distributed.
- CRG member suggestion that everyone needs to be able to understand that, because communities think they will be left out.
- CRG comment that $60 million isn't much between 6 LGAs.

  EnergyCo advised they are currently in the middle of the engagement program for the CEBP, team have been in the field for community conversations and drop-in sessions, First Nations sessions, webinars, targeted briefings, and a community survey is currently open until 18 September.
- There will be another push for the survey before it closes. Close to 200 responses received so far. Insights so far include health and medical services, economic and workforce development, and water and wastewater management as key priority areas.
- In terms of timeline, the team will compile a report with the data and feedback – this will be published around the end of October. EnergyCo aims to finalise the program later this year and open for applications, with application assessments to be carried out early next year and funding awarded around mid-2027.
- CRG suggestion for workshop discussion about which level of government is responsible for which services.
- CRG comment that a Muswellbrook project said they would give people free power, and this wasn't equitable, so instead they will give money to council, and people will get free rates instead.
- CRG comment that there are always arguments about who is affected and who gets the benefits.

Item 9. General business, questions and updates

- Likely to be an online session for the Consumer Trustee Overview – to be confirmed.
- Request for suggestions and feedback about how to engage with people and give them more information especially in relation to the EIS that is to go on exhibition later this year.
- Chair comment that the EIS is an enormous document, there still needs to be a conversation about the granular impacts.
- What are the general ways in which communication can be improved, such as people on the ground and on the phone to keep people informed?

  CRG responses that:

  - EnergyCo could speak on the radio and clarify some issues.
  - Radio is providing regular segments about windfarm progress.
  - Localise the information for each community so they don't have to go through the whole document
  - Comment that Goulburn Valley Solar Farm newsletter gets delivered to all people in the area.
- EnergyCo response that landholder presentations will be held in local communities, which will focus on that specific community.
- EnergyCo response that a hard copy newsletter is sent to everyone within the project area twice a year and as needed. Internet is relied upon, but there is value to a hard copy in the hand for people who don't have internet or access to email.
- EnergyCo will continue to have place managers and acquisition managers who are dedicated to those landholders and that specific property. If a property owner has requested information about specific topics we will arrange meetings with the right people.
- Meeting closed 6.32pm

Actions

#	Action	Responsible
1	Chair to write to the members who withdrew to ask if they intend to return to the CRG. Based on the response EnergyCo to recruit for the three community representative positions.	Chairperson/ EnergyCo
2	When CRG vacancy recruitment starts, EnergyCo will share advertisement for members to share on their channels.	Melissa Maurer
3	Chair to send calendar invitations for future meetings.	Chairperson
4	Noel to email Laura a shape file of the area that Nungaroo LALC are interested in having biodiversity study information for.	Noel Downs
5	Clarify what the Act defines as an access area as opposed to an access network.	Emily Speers Mears
6	Request that EnergyCo arrange representation to discuss CWO incident and the outcome of the investigation.	
7	EnergyCo to investigate whether Nungaroo Local Aboriginal Land Council can be provided with LIDAR information.	
8	EnergyCo to send info about change to legislation regarding CEBP distribution.	Melissa Maurer

Upcoming meeting

Wednesday 25 November - 4pm – 6.30pm