

MINUTES
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –
MEETING #16 – 2 November 2022

Meeting date: 2 November 2022
Meeting time: 6pm – 8.00pm, Oscar’s Hotel
Meeting called by: Catherine Botta

CCG Meeting Purpose: The CCG is a consultative forum and not a decision-making forum.

Attendees

Catherine Botta	Independent Chair
Damien Kennedy	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central
Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Jeff Rigby	Executive Project Sponsor – AusNet Services
Stephanie McGregor	Executive Project Director, Delivery – AusNet Services
Ahmad Attar-Bashi	Executive Project Director, Development – AusNet Services
Justin Justin	Stakeholder Engagement Specialist – AusNet Services
Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

Apologies

Martin Webb Community member – Moorabool/CCG East

Not attended

Grant Harrison	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Katie Gleisner	Manager Planning & Development – Pyrenees Shire Council
Vanessa Osborn	Coordinator Major Developments – Moorabool Shire Council
Darren Rudd	Manager City Design & Strategy – Melton City Council
David George	Head of Planning & Development – Northern Grampians Shire

Agenda item 1	Apologies, minutes and actions of previous meeting
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- Independent Chair opened the meeting noting the apology.
- No comments nor changes to the September meeting minutes had been received, the minutes have been accepted.
- Actions from the previous meeting were discussed and resolved as follows:

Actions	Status
Provide information about the entire land access and acquisition process in detail.	AS - It was highlighted that the information provided was not sufficient and a clear and simple factsheet outlining the process and landowner rights is still being requested, to remain open .

	<p>There was a broader discussion about the heightened stress and concern within the community about this and the unclear messages on compulsory acquisition being provided by Land Engagement Officers. It was also requested that a fact sheet be provided in other formats as well, just not as a document.</p> <p>Individual CCG members will discuss their concerns with AS outside of the CCG.</p>
CCG members to send questions around the fire risk to the secretariat to be addressed at a future meeting.	All – No further questions have been received. Closed.
Provide further information on the RIT-T process and review.	AS – AS provided papers on this topic prior to the meeting. Closed , subject to the referenced presentations to be sent separately.
Monitor and feedback whether the WRL project will be designated as a National Significant project.	AS - AS provided papers on this topic prior to the meeting. Closed.
AusNet to share with the CCG any presentations and hand-outs from the drop-in sessions and dinners.	AS – this presentation was shared prior to the meeting. Closed.
AusNet to share localised issues that were raised at the drop-in sessions and dinners.	AS – this will be provided to the group on 3 Nov 2022. Closed.
CCG members to consider the future format of the CCG post EES submission.	All – discussed at this meeting, see agenda item 5. Closed.
Previous action items:	
Discussion about redundancy and load capacity within the network to be held offline with technical expert and presented to group at next meeting	<p>To remain open, as more questions regarding capacity and backup are anticipated.</p> <p>Meeting to discuss questions held on 3 Nov 2022 at 10am did not resolve all issues.</p>
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain open , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
Further questions regarding the CSR and/or CBF to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain open , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
AusNet to confirm whether an options agreement is tied to the landowner or the land.	To remain open , it was noted that the easement is tied to the land and transferred to new owner. However, it was requested that the entire land access process be discussed in detail.

Darren Edward's resignation letter

- The chair read excerpts from Darren Edward's resignation letter and thanked him for his involvement and contribution to the group.

Agenda item 2 Open Q&A session

- NB, questions and responses are not verbatim.

Question/comment	Response
Reference to the National Energy Transformation Partnership (the Partnership) Priority Themes paper provided to the group prior to the meeting. It was requested that AusNet push to have the WRL project recognised as a National Significant project, as it will impact on the national grid.	<p>The three projects listed as National Significant projects are so-called "actionable" projects under AEMO's Integrated System Plan. The WRL (formerly the WVTN project) was already underway when AEMO nominated 'actionable' projects, therefore it was not deemed "actionable".</p> <p>The declaration relates to the timing of the projects, not the impact it will have on the national grid.</p> <p>AS will feedback this question and request for recognition to AEMO, but acknowledges that it is outside of AS's control.</p>
What is happening at the Sydenham transfer station as part of this project?	<p>AS showed photos and mark-ups of the proposed terminal station. This is an existing AusNet asset build in the 1980s, it is therefore due for a refurbishment, regardless of the WRL project. It is proposed to rebuild the existing transfer station and integrate the WRL project power lines within the existing footprint of the site. AS is also looking to future-proof the site to allow for further expansion, given the expected growth within the state.</p> <p>Depending on the timing of the WRL project, planning for the rebuild of the existing station would have to start separately, within the next 12 months. Planning for the rebuild would take up to 12 months and construction would take another 9-12 months.</p> <p>AS to share photos and mark-ups with the group.</p>
Would there be space for a battery at the site?	A battery would not be placed within the terminal station site, maybe adjacent, but there would be availability for a battery connection to the grid. The Victorian Big Battery was referenced, which sits adjacent to and connects into the Moorabool terminal station near Geelong.
What would the size of a new terminal station be, if the existing one didn't require a rebuild?	A new, smaller terminal station would sit side by side to the existing one within the footprint of the site.
Why wouldn't a battery be located on the site?	Given the expected growth within the state, it is a strategic planning issue regarding priorities for land use. A battery would in all probability be located somewhere else and connected to the terminal station.

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<p>Given the site visit of AusNet's CEO and AEMO of the Mount Prospect proposed terminal station site, will there be a change of location?</p>	<p>Both AEMO and AusNet's CEO understand the concerns and issues raised by the community. AS has provided further information and feedback from various stakeholders, but the VNI West proposal is also a consideration and AS is not privy to that information for reasons of probity.</p> <p>AEMO is considering how both projects interconnect, but AS is not involved in those deliberations.</p> <p>AS understands that AEMO and local councils held a roundtable discussion on the VNI West project in late October 2022.</p>
<p>Reference to the Murraylink, which is a single DC link 220 megawatt of capacity which extends 176 kilometres from Red Cliffs in Victoria to Berri in South Australia, which is being placed underground and connects to the WRL at the western end. Was there a RIT-T process? Why can this be built underground versus WRL?</p>	<p>Murraylink is a merchant interconnector, in that it was developed privately as a commercial power trading link which means it was developed based on an opportunity to make money from energy trading on power price differences and demand between two power markets. As a private project it didn't require a RIT-T process, ie a private developer took on the economic risk of the project to make a profit. WRL is not a private interconnector and its purpose benefits the whole network and therefore is subject to the RIT-T process. The undergrounding approach and HVDC technology for Murraylink was the decision of the private developers of the project.</p> <p>AS has been appointed by AEMO specifically to deliver an overhead HVAC transmission network line.</p> <p>Looking at only the construction aspect of Murraylink, it has been acknowledged by AS that undergrounding is technically feasible for WRL but it is not without significant cost and environmental impacts. Both HVAC and HVDC and undergrounding and overhead have impacts.</p> <p>However, as part of the EES, AS is looking at undergrounding and partial undergrounding of the WRL.</p>
<p>Has the Labor commitment to reinstate the SEC an impact on the future or scope of the project?</p>	<p>AS hasn't been involved in any discussions around recent government announcements linked to the idea of a new SEC for Victoria. With the commencement of the caretaker period in the lead up to the State election, there will be limited engagement between AS and government.</p> <p>It is appreciated that there is limited detail on what is proposed by the current government regarding a possible SEC. However, it appears the main aim is to ease cost-of-living pressures via a form of publicly owned retail energy business. Given the pipeline of further renewable energy projects and the increase in the state's emission reduction and renewable energy targets, the SEC proposition may also be about accelerating renewable energy generation.</p>
<p>Concerns were raised about the firefighting capacity around towers and transmission lines.</p> <p>Also, the risks to the general population of falling towers and sparks etc.</p>	<p>AS has offered to meet with all CFA brigades along the route to discuss their concerns. A Fire Forum is planned for early December 2022 to discuss firefighting issues and the CCG members will be invited to participate. There have been meetings with the CFA's Deputy Chief Officer about this topic.</p>

Will landowners receive formal acquisition offers before the EES?	Valuations need to happen before formal offers of compensation can be made and this process is continuing. Only landowners who will have infrastructure sited on or passing over their land will be offered compensation. The final route may change as part of the EES process, therefore negotiations are undertaken in good faith based on the current proposed route.
Will the alternative route options currently advertised be resolved before the EES?	This depends on whether AS can access the properties along the alternative routes. Where no access is provided, these issues won't be able to be resolved and so both routes will be taken into the EES. In the meantime, however, negotiations will continue with landowners on both routes in good faith. If any undergrounding of the line is an outcome of the EES process, then the route could change again.
What is the difference in process between voluntary and compulsory acquisition?	Voluntary option agreements can be negotiated at any point, including during the EES period. Whilst discussions can occur at any time, there cannot be formal execution of any compulsory acquisition until after the EES. It was discussed that the EES outcomes could shape/impact route, which would therefore need to flow through to further landholder engagement. Compulsory acquisition is viewed as the last resort and AS will need to demonstrate that all avenues for voluntary acquisition have been exhausted. Therefore, voluntary negotiations provide more certainty to landowners at the moment.
The 2009 Royal Commission into the fires has recommended that distribution lines be placed underground. The State Government commissioned a study into the costs and timelines for this, has this been released?	<p>The Victoria Bushfire Royal Commission (VBRC) made several recommendations relating to electricity network, emergency management and other things. As part of the process the VBRC explored undergrounding of high-risk distribution lines, however there are high cost and time issues with undergrounding the distribution lines. Some undergrounding of distribution lines was conducted under government initiated programs (eg Powerline Replacement Fund) based on a state-wide mapping that identified the high-risk areas.</p> <p>The recommendations with respect to distribution networks also included asset inspection practices, vegetation management, and other network management and asset replacement programs. It was noted that the risk profile of transmission lines and distribution lines are different due to many factors such as the design of the asset, clearance to the ground and vegetation, and vegetation management of transmission easements.</p>

Actions	Who
Share photos and mark-ups of the proposed terminal station with the group.	AS
Invite the CCG members to the Fire Forum in December.	AS

Agenda item 3	Discussion – Compensation Forum
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- AS is developing a compensation framework which will cover aspects such as the voluntary and compulsory acquisition process, disturbance and access agreements.
- A package of documents will be compiled, including a comprehensive options agreement, a fact sheet, an easement and compensation guide document, and a valuation certificate.
- The document package and allocated funds have been compared to equivalent landholder package for the Hume Link project.
- The framework will be finalised in readiness for release in early 2023 and has had input from various state agencies, the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner and the landowner advisory group (consisting of landowners outside of the project).
- AS will not hold public forums due to privacy concerns, but will instead hold one on one meetings with landholders.
- It was outlined that a consistent approach to discussions with landholders is required. AS acknowledges this and specific training will be provided to the Land Engagement Officers that will be dealing directly with landholders.
- So far, over 50 valuations have been undertaken, predominantly in the western section of the project.

Agenda item 4	Discussion – Future of the CCG
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- It was acknowledged that the project is transitioning into a new phase in proceeding to the EES and the Chair asked the members for feedback on what worked and what didn't to inform a potential future CCG format.
- It was raised that sometimes information wasn't forthcoming and the CCG didn't have access to certain documents before they were published, and issues with transparency.
- Concerns were raised that feedback wasn't taken on board and no explanation given why feedback wasn't taken up, also that the CCG wasn't involved in decision-making.
- The timeliness of distribution of presentations and minutes after the meetings was mentioned as well as lack of clarity around rules for CCG members distributing documents to the public.
- It was seen as disappointing that there hasn't been more council and community representation at the meetings.
- Members found it useful to hear what other members thought, and the questions and issues emerging in their community.
- Access to experts and the AS leadership team was positively highlighted. Members said they found that membership of the group was valuable and useful - some wishing they had joined earlier in the process.

- AS said that the group has had an influence internally, raising questions and issues has often changed/informed their approach.
- AS said they are very appreciative of the contribution and input from all members of the group and the commitment that group members have made to attending meetings.
- Regarding a future CCG format, following feedback and options were discussed:
 - CCG to continue until the EES is exhibited and then decide on future of CCG based on the information in the EES documentation.
 - CCG to come together just before the EES exhibition to discuss submission process.
 - CCG to come together two weeks into the exhibition period to discuss the documents and question selected experts (half-day/full-day workshop format)
 - Post EES and subject to project approvals, it was generally agreed that localised groups could be considered for the construction phase.

Agenda item 7	Next meeting date, topic
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- It was agreed that the CCG would pause and reconvene two weeks into the EES exhibition period. All CCG members will be sent the list of experts and presentations given during the course of the CCG and members will be asked to indicate the expert topic areas or the presentations they would be most interested in hearing again noting the specific questions relating to the topic or presentation. AS would then consider what might be feasible given the current workload in completing the EES document. The selected experts would be invited to attend the meeting to respond to specific questions from the group, including directing CCG members to where the information can be found in the EES documentation.
- Meeting closed at 8.40pm.

Actions	Who
Prepare a fact sheet on the land acquisition process outlining landowners' rights.	AS
Send AEMC presentations referenced in the Review of the Regulatory Frameworks for Electricity Transmission Planning and Investment (the Review) in the National Energy Market paper to the group separately.	Secretariat
Share photos and mark-ups of the proposed terminal station at Sydenham.	AS
Invite the CCG members to the CFA fire forum in December.	AS
Send CCG members list of all topics and presentations.	Secretariat
CCG members to select key topics and experts to be invited to next meeting during the EES exhibition period and send in questions before the meeting.	All