

# MINUTES

## WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP – MEETING #17 – 29 March 2023

**Meeting date:** 29 March 2023  
**Meeting time:** 5.30pm – 8.30pm, 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
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
Ahmad Attar-Bashi	Executive Project Director, Development – AusNet Services
Justin Justin	Stakeholder Engagement Specialist – AusNet Services
Damien Kennedy	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

### Apologies

Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Henry Bezuidenhout	Exec. Manager Community Planning & Development – Moorabool Shire Council
Stephanie McGregor	Executive Project Director, Delivery – AusNet Services

### Not attended

Grant Harrison	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Katie Gleisner	Manager Planning & Development – Pyrenees Shire Council
Darren Rudd	Manager City Design & Strategy – Melton City Council
David George	Head of Planning & Development – Northern Grampians Shire
Joanna Cuscaden	Executive Manager Development Facilitation – Ballarat City Council

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

Actions	Status
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<b>Actions from previous meetings:</b>	
Provide information about the entire land access and acquisition process in detail.	<p>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 <b>open</b>.</p> <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> <p><b>Update 29 March 2023:</b> Reference was made to the Option for Easement process and compensation fact sheet released by AusNet earlier in March.</p> <p><b>Closed</b></p>
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 <b>open</b>, 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> <p><b>Update 29 March 2023:</b> Allan to provide more questions in due course.</p>
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	<p>To remain <b>open</b>, an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.</p> <p><b>Update 29 March 2023: Unchanged</b></p>
Further questions regarding the CSR and/or CBF to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	<p>To remain <b>open</b>, an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.</p> <p><b>Update 29 March 2023: Unchanged</b></p>
AusNet to confirm whether an options agreement is tied to the landowner or the land.	<p>To remain <b>open</b>, 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.</p> <p><b>Update 29 March 2023:</b> Reference was made to the Option for Easement process and compensation fact sheet released by AusNet earlier in March.</p> <p><b>Closed</b></p>
<b>Actions from the November 2022 meeting:</b>	

Prepare a fact sheet on the land acquisition process outlining landowners' rights.	AS - Reference was made to the Option for Easement process and compensation fact sheet released by AusNet earlier in March. <b>Closed</b>
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 – sent per email on 3 and 4 November 2022 <b>Closed</b>
Share photos and mark-ups of the proposed terminal station at Sydenham.	AS – sent on 21 December 2022 <b>Closed</b>
Invite the CCG members to the CFA fire forum in December.	AS – see details in the minutes <b>Closed</b>
Send CCG members list of all topics and presentations.	Secretariat – sent on 25 November 2022 <b>Closed</b>
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 – to remain open until the EES is exhibited <b>Open</b>

Agenda item 2	AEMO update
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- AEMO's Victorian Planning team and Transgrid are jointly considering options for the VNI-West route and terminal station location based on the Project Assessment Draft Report (PADR) released in July 2022.
- The VNI-West Consultation Report – Options Assessment was released in February 2023 and is open for public consultation until 5 April 2023.
- Based on feedback, a Project Assessment Conclusion Report (PACR) will be released in May 2023, which could potentially impact on the terminal station location. All considered options bar Option 1, recommend to relocate the terminal station.
- It seems Option 5 is the preferred option.
- If the terminal station is moved further west, the currently proposed 220kV line will be upgraded to 500kV as part of the WRL project.
- On 20 February 2023 the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources issued an Order under the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 (NEVA Order) that enables AEMO to carry out preconstruction works for VNI-West.
- It was discussed whether this NEVA Order also allows the Minister to make decisions on WRL as the Order replaces the RIT-T process.

- The community expressed strong concerns about the consultation process and decision-making without community input.

Agenda item 3	EES update
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- The Planning Department's Impact Assessment Unit has moved to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), however the Unit is still responsible for the EES process.
- The VNI-West project has cascading impacts on WRL regarding the terminal station location and the upgrade from 220kV to 500kV in the western section, therefore WRL's EES process is on hold until a decision on VNI-West has been made.
- AusNet is working with the TRG to determine the scope of the EES and impact on current investigations. Not all reports will need to be updated, but some like Flora and Fauna, Cultural Heritage and Groundwater will have major changes.
- AusNet aims to submit the revised EES to DTP by the end of 2023, however it is not clear when the EES will be published, as DTP will then need to undertake an Adequacy Assessments first.
- It was questioned whether the 500kV route would be the same as the current proposed 220kV route between Waubra and Bulgana, which was confirmed. The 500kV lines would run parallel to the existing 220kV lines.
- It was discussed whether the route will have to go near Mt Prospect, if the terminal station is relocated. As part of the EES, alternative routes are being assessed.
- A connection from the WRL to Ballarat will be via the existing Ballarat-Bendigo transmission line.
- It was mentioned that the upgrade to 500kV in the western section will unlock the capacity in the south-west and north-west Renewable Energy Zones (REZ).
- The impact of the reinstatement of the State Electricity Commission (SEC) was discussed, however the focus of the SEC is on power generation and retail to reduce energy costs, not on transmission.
- The role of VicGrid was discussed as a conduit between WRL and the Minister. VicGrid is focused on the Offshore wind projects in Gippsland and connections to the existing terminal station in the Latrobe Valley.
- AEMO's and AusNet's CEOs visit was discussed and the community protest. Further engagement with the community was not possible as commitments elsewhere had already been planned. It was agreed that the format of the visit was not ideal, as participating community members felt intimidated by the protest.
- The visit was a follow-up from the last visit in August 2022 to report back on commitments given. It was questioned whether the release of AusNet's Landholder guide was timed to coincide with the CEOs visit, which it was not. The guide was released to provide context around the state government's compensation announcement.

- The timing of the release of the Access Agreement package in December was criticised, as it was close to Christmas. Other feedback AusNet received was that it was good to have the information available. The guide has been reviewed based on feedback and has been published with some FAQs. It was questioned whether they were on the webpage yet.
- It was questioned whether it was too soon to offer landholders compensation, however the offered compensation is to compensate landholders for their time in dealing with AusNet during access negotiations.
- The Essential Services Commission’s (ESC) Code of Practice was discussed. The Code will be based on the Statement of Expectations (SoE) and will be enforceable, whereas the SoE is not. The ESC will release a Draft Determination paper in May, which will be open to consultation, with the view to finalise the Code by August 2023.

Agenda item 4	Stakeholder engagement update
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- AusNet will be undertaking pop-up information sessions in early May in the eastern section between Ballarat and Sydenham. It was discussed whether more localised sessions along the route would be better, however these pop-ups don’t exclude further information sessions. AusNet sees the pop-ups as an avenue to inform the wider general public about the project.
- Once AEMO releases the terminal station location, AusNet is planning a roadshow along the route between Mt Prospect and Bulgana for stakeholder groups such as councillors, industry, water authorities etc to inform of the changes. Feedback given was that AusNet needs to be clear on the objective and format of the sessions to manage expectations.
- Together with AEMO a town hall event will be organised to discuss the changes due to the VNI-West project. AusNet will assist with facilitation, however it is planned as an AEMO event. It was suggested a clear demarcation of the WRL and the VNI-West projects and who is responsible for what aspects needs to be made.
- The Fire Forum was discussed, AusNet is in discussion with all fire authorities. Reference is given to the Electricity Transmission Lines – Bushfire Mitigation and Community Safety report, released by Energy Safe Victoria. The group expressed concerns about the fire risk and encourages further engagement between AusNet and the CFA.

Agenda item 5	Community perception/questions/emerging issues
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- Reference was made to the Goldfields World Heritage bid and the impact the route selection would have on potential heritage sites.
- The difference in clearances under transmission lines for vegetation versus agricultural equipment was raised as a potential issue for landholders.

- AusNet was asked whether they would consider annual compensation payments, as offered by Transgrid. AusNet will discuss with individual landowners.
- It was raised whether the undergrounding options in the Darley and Melton areas would follow the same route as the overhead lines. Undergrounding is considered as part of the EES options paper, however underground lines would not follow the overhead route.

Agenda item 6	Future of the CCG
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- It was preferred that future meetings be held in person rather than online.
- It was also requested that a AEMO representative be invited to the next CCG meeting.

Agenda item 7	Next meeting date
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- The next meeting will be in late May/Early June, subject to more information becoming available.
- Meeting closed at 8.15pm.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Who</b>
Upload the Landholder guide and FAQs on the WRL webpage	AS
Invite an AEMO representative to the next meeting	AS