

**MINUTES  
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –  
MEETING #19 – 9 August 2023**

**Meeting date:** 9 August 2023  
**Meeting time:** 5.30pm – 7.30pm, 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
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Bronwyn Southee	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Ahmad Attar-Bashi	Executive Project Director Development – AusNet Services (online)
Mitchell Hume	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Manager - AEMO
Samantha Olsen	Stakeholder Engagement - AEMO
Justin Justin	Stakeholder Engagement Specialist – AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

**Apologies**

Ian Terrill Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central

**Not attended**

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 apologies.
- No comments nor changes to the June meeting minutes had been received, the minutes have been accepted.
- Ahmad provided an update on staff changes within the organisation:
  - Jeff Rigby retired from AusNet.
  - Steph McGregor has resigned from AusNet.
  - Malcolm Tinkler has joined the team as General Manager WRL for AusNet, who reports into the AusNet Executive team.
  - Ahmad takes over the responsibilities for both WRL Project Development and Delivery.

- Justin moved into a stakeholder engagement role in Project Delivery to focus on social procurement and legacy benefits.
- Carlee takes over the Stakeholder Manager role with AusNet.

- Actions from the previous meeting were discussed and resolved as follows:

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Status</b>
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , 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 <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
Vicki to raise the status of discussions with AusNet on the Advisory Group with the MCHPA steering group.	<b>Open</b> , no update on the Advocacy Group available.
Invite Mitch Hume, Stakeholder Manager AEMO, to the next CCG.	<b>Closed</b> , Mitch and Samantha attended meeting.
AusNet to ask ESV for an anonymised copy of the letter sent to MCHPA regarding firefighting impacts.	<b>Closed</b> , ESV unable to supply letter due to privacy. CFA supplied comments in response to questions. Letter sent to CCG 28 June 2023.
AusNet to clarify the process to provide the Cultural Heritage Assessments reports to individual landholders.	<b>Closed</b> , participants can request a copy from AusNet.
AusNet will provide a sample template of a Visual Impact Assessment report to the CCG.	<b>Closed</b> , Justin shared a visual assessment report from a windfarm. A WRL VIA report could not be shared for privacy reasons.
AusNet to inform Hepburn Shire Council of upcoming activity requiring traffic management plans.	Ongoing

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Who</b>
AusNet to send VIA report of the Darley golf course to Randall.	Justin
AusNet to source a VIA report from another relevant project.	Justin
Randall to seek approval to share the Darley golf course VIA report with the group.	Randall
Ausnet to organise a VIA on Martin's property.	Justin

Agenda item 2	AEMO discussion
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- Mitch has been with AEMO for six months, and prior to that has worked with Transgrid. Has worked on Project Energy Connect, NSW/SA interconnector.
- Following questions and responses are not verbatim.

Questions	Response
What impact will the Energy Connect project have on VNI West/Kerang Link and is AEMO considering a transmission line from Mortlake north through Horsham?	<p>Energy Connect is under construction, so the route has been determined. The VNI West project is still finalising its preferred route and the proposed corridor runs north from the terminal station in Bulgana to north of Kerang where it will connect to NSW.</p> <p>VicGrid has a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Development Plan to unlock the Southwest REZ, which potentially connects to the Bulgana terminal station. For more information, please refer to p 129 of the Transmission Expansion Options Report.</p>
<p>Will the Tasmanian government's concerns about Marinus Link affect the plans for the mainland transmission network?</p> <p>How flexible is AEMO regarding planned transmission lines, if there are constraints or changes, ie the legal action against WRL.</p>	<p>AEMO is still considering the Marinus Link project as part of the ISP. The ISP is released every two years, an updated ISP will be released in 2024.</p> <p>AEMO released a Transmission Expansion Options Report, and the 2023 Inputs, Assumptions and Scenarios Report (IASR) in July 2023, both documents consider developments in the sector and contingencies for planned projects.</p> <p>AEMO to share these documents with the group.</p>
Will the 2024 ISP draft be released in December?	Yes, at this point.
Have the design issues around the WRL been resolved in preparation of the EES?	<p>AusNet is still refining the design around the Hepburn Lagoon and with the relocation of the terminal station and the uprate, there are some outstanding issues to be considered. There are also ongoing discussions with host landowners about the micro-siting of the towers and the easements.</p> <p>The EES documents will outline all considered alternative options.</p>
Are there any provisions for a back-up link, should the new transmission lines fail (reference to the open action item regarding redundancy in the system).	The ISP considers a forecast for demand and the planning of REZs across the state considers the required renewable supply capacity and includes redundancies. Failure of a tower is a risk to the network

	<p>at any time and is not related specifically to WRL or VNI West projects.</p>
<p>Given the public acknowledgement that the RIT-T process is not adequate to consider all aspects of new transmission lines, what is AEMO doing to rectify that?</p>	<p>Both the WRL and VNI West projects were evaluated through the RIT-T process and the rules that were in place at the time.</p> <p>Minister Bowen has made an application to the Australian Energy Market Commission to change the National Electricity Rules regarding how the process considers social factors in the planning. Currently changes to this process are being explored through the new VTIF Framework that is being led by Vic Grid. This new framework is for new projects and will not be applied to projects that are already evaluated.</p> <p>A draft determination of the rule change is due soon, which will be more prescriptive of how communities are to be involved.</p>
<p>Why isn't more consideration being given to using the existing easements instead of building new transmission lines, given that the demand centres haven't changed?</p>	<p>The demand centres haven't changed, however with the switch to renewable energy in the network, the supply centres have now moved from areas like the Latrobe Valley to the REZs in the west. Therefore, these supply centres need to be connected to the network to satisfy the demand.</p> <p>At the same time, the existing network is being optimised and upgraded with new technologies to unlock further capacity. However, in urban areas, development has bordered the existing easements and therefore in some cases there is no capacity to expand the easements.</p>
<p>Renewable energy generation projects in western regions have been approved before a suitable transmission line was in place. Is there a strategic network review to allow renewable generation to occur where transmission lines already exist?</p>	<p>VicGrid's Victorian Transmission Investment Framework investigates how transmission infrastructure is planned around the REZs.</p> <p>The WRL and VNI West projects have been referenced in the ISP since 2018.</p>
<p>To what degree does AEMO take new and evolving technology into account when planning new transmission lines?</p>	<p>The ISP takes new technologies into consideration, including increased battery storage. The RIT-T process also encourages proponents to consider non-network solutions, including additional equipment in substations to improve functionality.</p>
<p>If undergrounding of transmission lines were to be mandated, like in other countries, what would this mean for AEMO's projects?</p>	<p>The ISP lays out the optimal development path or best cost path to the planned 2050 energy system. It also references policy changes and new and emerging technologies etc. Mandated undergrounding would impact on the economics of projects, and AEMO would respond to any legislated changes as required. The ISP</p>

	considers best of whole system outcomes, which includes costs.
With the proposed upgrade to 500kv in the western section, is partial undergrounding still being considered for sensitive areas around Mount Ararat and places such as Darley/Bacchus Marsh as part of the EES? This will impact on the project costs.	<p>Alternative routes and also partial undergrounding are being considered as part of the EES investigations for the WRL project.</p> <p>In general, the ISP balances the network requirements with the needs of all consumers, not just the impacted communities, but also the electricity users. When considering the optimal development path, current policies are taken into account.</p>
With the proposed upgrade to 500kv, is there any changes to the REZ or an increased awareness around the REZ? Is there any strategic planning being undertaken?	The proposed increase in the capacity and the location of the transfer station will potentially generate more interest from renewable generators.
<p>The system planners need to consider the impacts of more wind and solar farms on the communities which will host them. The impacts will be huge and some landowners are already being approached by renewable companies without any prior knowledge of the issues.</p> <p>It is essential to understand that the western REZ is not an uninhabited area that can be exploited, but an area that is home to many multiple-generation old farms that are operating successfully.</p>	<p>The proposed changes to the project will move the area of interest for renewable energy generators further west and some operators might use undesirable tactics when engaging with landowners.</p> <p>However, with the proposed transmission upgrades, VicGrid will be able to plan for access from renewable generators to the network better and optimise the outputs from the REZ.</p> <p>AEMO is undertaking work to consider these objections and issues by applying a multi-criteria analysis, which takes connection to land and land use into consideration.</p>
What is the differentiation between VicGrid and AEMO?	<p>AEMO doesn't own any transmission assets, it plans and operates the national electricity market. In Victoria AEMO is also the Transmission System planner. This includes administering regulatory approval processes for major electricity transmission projects and developing the integrated System Plan.</p> <p>VicGrid plans and coordinates REZs in Victoria.</p>

- Ahmad leaves the meeting at 7pm.

Agenda item 3	Stakeholder engagement update
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- AusNet has been meeting with councils to update on the potential changes to the project.
- Further engagement has been on hold pending the outcome of the NEVA Orders and the released PACR, however some pop-up information sessions and webinars are planned for late

September/early October. The webinars will cover the most commonly raised issues around farming practices, undergrounding, bushfire risks and mitigation and compensation.

- The landowner engagement teams are working with landowners to finalise compensation offers and easement options.
- AusNet will also provide more information about the EES process and how people can get involved and understand the documents in the next months and during the exhibition period.
- Discussion about the wording around the proposed upgrades and relocation of the terminal station, as these are still proposed, however there is a recognition that they will have to be implemented, if the project goes ahead.
- It was also mentioned that an update on the EES scope is critical for the affected communities, to understand the impacts of the VNI West project on the WRL EES.
- Justin leaves the meeting at 7.10pm

Agenda item 4	Community perception/questions/emerging issues
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- Many open questions around the impact to the WRL EES due to the VNI West. Many communities are in limbo and are waiting on a resolution.
- Reference to the upcoming protest on Spring Street (see attached media article) and the legal proceedings.
- Question about the VNI West CCG. The expression of interest period has closed and AEMO has received a range of interest. The first meeting is to be held in the next weeks.

Agenda item 5	Next meeting date, topic
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- Next meeting will be called, when there is an outcome to be discussed, possible later in 2023 or early 2024.
- Meeting closed at 7.20pm.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Who</b>
AusNet to send VIA report of the Darley golf course to Randall.	AusNet
AusNet to source a VIA report from another relevant project.	AusNet
Randall to seek approval to share the Darley golf course VIA report with the group.	Randall
Ausnet to organise a VIA on Martin's property.	AusNet
AusNet to organise another meeting with Allan and Terry regarding the redundancy of the network.	AusNet
AEMO to share the ISP and the Transmission Expansion Options Report with the group.	AEMO/Secretariat

AusNet to inform the CCG and wider community of any changes to the EES scope.
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AusNet
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Referenced documents:

<https://aemo.com.au/consultations/current-and-closed-consultations/2023-transmission-expansion-options-report-consultation>

<https://aemo.com.au/en/consultations/current-and-closed-consultations/2023-inputs-assumptions-and-scenarios-consultation>

<https://aemo.com.au/en/energy-systems/major-publications/integrated-system-plan-isp/2024-integrated-system-plan-isp>

<https://www.aemc.gov.au/rule-changes/enhancing-community-engagement-transmission-building>