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**MINUTES  
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –  
MEETING #24 – 11 September 2024**

**Meeting date:** 11 September 2024  
**Meeting time:** 5.30 pm, 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
Archie Conroy	Community member – Ballan/CCG
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central (Chair, Moorabool Central Power Alliance)
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Gerard Carew	General Manager, Major Projects – AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Megan Cusack	Communications, Stakeholder and Land Engagement – AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Risk Communication Specialist, Strategic Engagement – AusNet Services
Barton Napier	Independent technical specialist – Tetra Tech Coffey Pty Ltd
Tania McIntyre	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

**Apologies**

Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Peter Dreimanis	Strategic Planning – City of Ballarat
Bronwyn Southee	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Catherine McLay	Moorabool Shire Council

**Not attended**

Jennifer Thomas	Northern Grampians Shire
Karl Sass	Melton City Council

Agenda item 1	Apologies, minutes, and actions of the previous meeting
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- The Independent Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged Country, welcomed the attendees, presenter and secretariat, and mentioned the apologies. The Chair welcomed Gerard Carew, General Manager of Major Projects from AusNet Services, to the meeting.
- The Chair noted that there were only three weeks between meetings, and as the minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with limited time for review, members were asked to provide comments by COB 18 September.
- Actions from the previous meeting were discussed and resolved as follows:

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<b>Actions</b>	<b>Status</b>
AusNet to confirm the distribution of the 65% of land parcels accessed along the route.	Complete. Update provided by AusNet during meeting which included 90% access between Tourello and Bulgana and approximately 30% land accessed between Darley and Tourello.
AusNet to share a summary of members' feedback and what changes have been made to fact sheets.	Complete. Consolidated factsheet feedback has been shared with members.
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat before a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss questions on undergrounding in November CCG meeting, when undergrounding is the key topic. .
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.
Discussion about land access agreements vs registering for financial legal advice support.	Complete. AusNet provided materials to secretariat to distribute to assist in clarifying the difference and process to access for all landholders.
Discussion whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF framework.	AusNet to clarify whether WRL is covered. OPEN

Agenda item 2	WRL update
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- Technical Reference Group (TRG) Meeting #26 was held on 10 September. Key meeting highlights included:
  - That the site investigations for the CHMP are still underway and included Geotechnical and Cultural Heritage surveys.
  - Early contractor involvement is continuing with shortlisted contractors including a joint venture between Acciona Construction Australia and Genus Infrastructure (AGJV) and a joint venture with CPB Contractors and UGL Engineering (CPB UGL JV). In the future, one of these organisations will be selected to partner with AusNet on the project.
- Community pop-up sessions are currently underway. Supporting the sessions is an online survey.
- AusNet confirmed that the projected EES submission would be in early 2025.
- Gerard Carew, General Manager, Major Projects at AusNet introduced himself to the CCG, offering details about his experience and future involvement. Noted that Gerard may not attend all meetings, but a member of the project leadership group would be in attendance.

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Agenda item 3	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A: Alternate Routes
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- See the attached presentation for more details.
- Barton Napier, an independent technical specialist from Tetra Tech Coffey Pty Ltd, presented to the CCG the alternative routes technical presentation
- Context and constraints
  - Barton began by explaining the three separate geographic transmission corridors from the Latrobe Valley to Melbourne and why they have been set up the way they have, noting that this is largely to ensure network security and reliability. He then explained that in Western Victoria all transmission lines connect to Moorabool terminal station near Geelong. Moorabool terminal station is connected to Sydenham terminal station via a single corridor with limited redundancy provided by the Geelong to Keilor transmission lines, which are 220 kV.
  - The WRL project aims to create a diversified path to generation.
  - Barton highlighted the key constraints considered when developing the current route, including national parks, threatened native vegetation, residential subdivisions, and Aboriginal and historic heritage. The Wombat Forest was also noted as key constraint as it is to be incorporated in the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, which is yet to be declared.
  - Barton noted that high quality agricultural land including horticulture is not recognised in planning schemes and hence is not included as a land use planning constraint in the constraints mapping. Members questioned how horticulture was measured and expressed dissatisfaction that horticultural impacts are not captured as constraints. Members expressed that they believed that horticultural constraints should be considered as part of the EES. Barton noted that the constraints map in his technical report considers the statutory (land use planning) requirements rather than land use constraints that do not have statutory protection. Barton noted that in NSW and Queensland high quality agricultural land is recognised in planning schemes (through planning overlays) and requires project proponents to demonstrate that project infrastructure will not unreasonably limit the agricultural potential of the land. Barton confirmed that while horticulture is not included in the constraints mapping in this technical area of study, it is considered by AusNet as part of the Environment Effects Statement through the agriculture technical study. The Chair requested that AusNet consider this discussion moving forward and apply clarifying language when discussing the topic of horticulture.
- Settlement patterns

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- Settlement patterns were discussed, highlighting key areas of constraint including:
- Areas to the west and south of Ballarat, the Creswick-Ballarat corridor, the Gordon-Bolwarrah corridor, the Melton-Bacchus Marsh corridor, and the Sydenham-Eynesbury corridor.
- Members challenged why the project would bypass Ballarat when the populations of Bacchus Marsh, Sydenham, Melton, and Darley are larger. Barton explained that topography challenges settlement that extends along the valleys between national and state parks and conservation reserves highly constrained areas around Ballarat. Members felt that some people/ townships were valued more than others in the project's decision-making.

• Horticultural soils

- Barton explained that horticultural soils were considered as part of the assessment using mapping prepared by the Department of Agriculture (available on Victorian Resources Online). Some members disagreed with this assessment and highlighted the potato summer crops potential west of Ballarat was not feasible without water.
- A member raised concerns that the assessments made by AusNet, and the information reflected in this presentation were based on incorrect or outdated datasets and needed to be supported by ground-truthing exercises. The technical presenter confirmed the datasets used in the report were the latest available and that the data had variable accuracy. The CCG expressed their collective dissatisfaction with the mapping and datasets involved with this assessment which are a combination of publicly available spatial data, data collected through landholder engagement, and data collected through technical surveys of areas for which AusNet has had access. Members expressed their views that more comprehensive data may have resulted in a different route.

• Alternative routes

- Barton explained the alternate routes proposed by landholders, community and government. The alternative routes discussed included the Lerderderg State Park, Wombat State Forest, the Southern corridor, the Creswick Plantation, RIT-T Option B3, Mortlake -Moorabool and the Waubra bypass.
- Some key points discussed included:
  - Lerderderg State Park: It doubles the distance from Darley but interacts with much more native vegetation and threatened species habitat.
  - Swans Road was discussed, noting the high residential impacts. Members noted concerns about shifting the pain of this project to other communities, highlighting that this was not the group's intent.
  - Lerderderg River Valley from Darley: Highlighted the considerable visual impacts.
  - Lerderderg SP (Darley partial underground): Barton discussed the difference between the overhead and underground routes and the differing technical requirements. Members queried whether impact assessments have been conducted on both

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underground options (Robertson Road–Swans Road option and the option north of Darley residential area). Barton responded that assessments have been completed on both and that the outcomes would be reflected in the EES. Undergrounding cable requirements were discussed in relation to this option, with Barton noting that 5 kilometres of underground cabling would take approximately one year to complete.

- Wombat State Forest: Increased biodiversity impacts on the greater glider/ phascogales were highlighted for this option. The risk of the easement creating a barrier to the movement of greater gliders was a key reason this alternative route was discounted.
  - Southern corridor: High risks associated with Aboriginal cultural heritage (massacre site and high-density artefacts along Werribee River and in the adjacent stony rises) were associated with this option. The Yoloak South Wind Farm was also identified as an impact. It was noted that approvals for this wind farm have conditions regarding transmission infrastructure that must be adhered to. Members stated that they felt that renewable stakeholders are favoured over transmission stakeholders and highlighted the perceived inequity here.
  - Moorabool-Sydenham corridor: AEMO would not support consolidating all Western Victoria transmission in a single corridor. It was also noted that the easement corridor is very close to the existing residential boundary for this option. This option would extend into existing residential properties. Members queried whether undergrounding could be an option here. Barton noted that this would require 10 – 15 kilometres of undergrounding, which would be cost-prohibitive.
  - Southern corridor at Moorabool West Road, Gordon: It was highlighted that this option was too impactful on existing dwellings and would also impact existing wildlife corridors in the Gordon–Bolwarrah wildlife corridor.
  - Creswick Plantation: Crown land was raised as a key consideration for this route, as AusNet cannot secure easements over Crown land vested in the Victorian Plantations Corporation. This option requires more native vegetation removal and transfers impacts from currently affected communities to communities adjacent to the state forest and plantation.
  - Mortlake-Moorabool: Technical and system security risks were highlighted with this option. This option consolidates transmission in the Moorabool–Sydenham corridor which is not supported by AEMO.
  - Waubra bypass (500kV uprate): A member commented that the area on this slide would be industrialised in the future due to these developments (including renewable developments) and that, moving forward, there will be no community living in these areas.
- Members broadly commented that they were dissatisfied with the lack of strategic thinking applied to the project and the broader planning of the grid. Members also raised concerns regarding the cost overlays associated with each option.

Agenda item 4	Fact sheet update, next steps
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- AusNet thanked members for the feedback provided across the multiple draft fact sheets and explained that the feedback had been compiled into a table that outlines the feedback provided by each member and AusNet’s response to the feedback.
- AusNet encourages members to provide feedback on the table and AusNet responses.

- Members queried how feedback provided directly during CCG meetings was reflected in fact sheets/ project alterations? AusNet noted that feedback is reflected in CCG minutes and published externally. Additionally, AusNet noted that feedback provided during CCG meetings would be reflected in the documents developed for the EES.
- AusNet committed to providing the CCG with a summary of the how feedback from members on the technical presentations has been considered. **ACTION**
- A member raised concerns about the laydown areas reflected within the new fact sheet, noting that this type of information should have been raised with the CCG and the community at a much earlier stage as it would have been known to AusNet. The group expressed frustration at AusNet's lack of transparency and proactive information sharing with the CCG.

Agenda item 5	Stakeholder Engagement Update
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- AusNet provided a snapshot of recent community engagement, including:
  - Two sessions were held week beginning 2 September, two in the week beginning 9 September, and a final two sessions are scheduled for the week beginning 16 September (8 sessions in total during September).
- AusNet highlighted that a community survey was available via the website and encouraged members to complete and share it with the broader community. This survey aims to summarise what AusNet has heard from engagement to date and validate issues and seek input from community on what they expect during EES exhibition.
- AusNet discussed the upcoming webinar scheduled for 14 October, noting that this webinar aims to present a summary of route changes to the community. AusNet noted that they were mindful of further upsetting the community and suggested cancelling the webinar if members felt it would not be valuable to the community. Members confirmed that this is not what the community would want to hear about and that it felt disingenuous.
- AusNet noted that a revised update to the online interaction map (a dwelling layout) would be released shortly (dwelling layout). Members requested that an updated aerial map be included on the webmap. AusNet agreed to investigate the options for an updated aerial map be included on the webmap. **ACTION**

Agenda item 6	Community perceptions
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- A CCG member presented a list of community concerns and perceptions, including:
  - CCG members wanted to ensure communication reflects that transmission lines do start fires.
  - The community wants to lodge a formal vote of no confidence regarding AusNet's land engagement undertaken to date and wants to understand the process to lodge this.

AusNet requested that CCG members provide information on land agent interactions and staff involvement so they could investigate. **ACTION**

- Members noted that the current pop-up session locations must be reviewed as the Lexton community feels forgotten. CCG members noted that they had previously raised concerns with appropriate pop-up locations with AusNet and AusNet agreed to look at alternative locations.
- CCG members and the community want clarity on how many transmission lines are proposed for the proposed easements, as they have received conflicting information. Members also queried whether upgraded distribution lines would cause additional impacts and costs to landholders and the broader community.
- Community members asked whether domestic solar systems would need to be switched off to mitigate constraints.
- The community requested access to the agricultural report to assist with making better decisions and providing feedback about the project.
- CCG members raised serious concerns regarding the perceived illegal access to properties and requested that AusNet provide an overview of the S93 process. **ACTION**
- A CCG member requested that AusNet seriously consider innovating the tower designs to make them less of an eyesore and potentially an attraction.

Agenda item 7	Next meeting date, topic
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- The Chair highlighted that there are still numerous topics of interest to cover and asked the CCG if there is an appetite for presenting more than one topic in the upcoming meetings. Members stated that they are most interested in covering the topics of undergrounding, economic and transport over EMF.
- It was agreed that the upcoming meetings would cover:
  - Meeting on 16 October: Transport and Economic
  - Meeting on 20 November: Undergrounding and Unanswered Questions.
- It was agreed that the next meeting in October would forgo the regular engagement updates as these could be shared via email.
- Meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

Actions	Who
Existing Actions	
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat before a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss questions on undergrounding

Actions	Who
	in November CCG meeting, when undergrounding is the key topic. .
Further questions regarding the Corporate Social Responsibility and/or Community Benefit Fund 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.
Discussion whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF framework.	AusNet to clarify whether WRL is covered. OPEN
New Actions	
AusNet committed to providing the CCG with a summary of the how feedback from members on the technical presentations has been considered.	AusNet
AusNet will investigate the options for an updated aerial map be included on the webmap.	AusNet
AusNet requested that CCG members provide information on land agent interactions and staff involvement so they could investigate	CCG Members
CCG members raised serious concerns regarding the perceived illegal access to properties and requested that AusNet provide an overview of the S93 process.	AusNet