

MINUTES

WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP – MEETING #27 – 10 June 2025

Meeting date: Tuesday 10 June 2025
Meeting time: 5.30 pm – 9:30pm, Oscar’s Hotel, Ballarat.
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)
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Gerard Carew	General Manager, Major Projects – AusNet Services
Mark Hogan	Director Communications, Stakeholder and Industry Engagement- AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Barton Napier	Independent technical specialist – Tetra Tech Coffey Pty Ltd
Chris Grinter	Technical Director - AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Strategic Engagement – AusNet Services
Catherine McLay	Moorabool Shire Council
Peter Dreimanis	City of Ballarat
Prue Beseler	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

Apologies

Rachel Blackwell	Pyrenees Shire Council
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Not attended

Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Jennifer Thomas	Northern Grampians Shire
Karl Sass	Melton City Council
Bronwyn Southee	Hepburn Shire Council

Agenda item 1	Welcome, apologies, minutes, and actions of the previous meeting – Chair
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- The Independent Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged Country, welcomed the attendees, presenter, and secretariat, and mentioned the apologies. Acknowledged the time since the last meeting, November 2024.
- The Chair reiterated the group's Terms of Reference, noting the purpose of the CCG is to enhance communications between the project team and community, better understand the community's concerns. It was highlighted that the group is not a decision-making body, and membership does not signify endorsement of the project.
- The Chair welcomed Barton and Chris, thanking them for coming in person and introductions were made amongst the group.
- CCG community member expressed frustration that there had been no meeting this year.
- CCG community member requested confirmation that concern raised at a previous CCG meeting had been adequately captured in the Minutes. **Action:** AusNet and Chair to review previous minutes to ensure the concern was captured and report back to group.

Agenda item 2	Project Update and Engagement update - AusNet
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ENGAGEMENT UPDATE (CARLEE GRANT)

- **Bushfire messaging** was discussed, with CCG community members expressing dissatisfaction and requesting a review. AusNet acknowledged the issue and noted that AusNet has made updates to improve communication.

ACTION: AusNet to review the actions taken from previous meeting when bushfire messaging was discussed. AusNet to respond to group regarding status.

- **Fact sheets-** CCG community members noted they do not support or endorse the Fact Sheets released by AusNet. AusNet commented that member feedback has been reviewed, and changes made based on this feedback. It was noted that 20+ fact sheets was not ideal and following feedback, AusNet confirmed it had listened and reduced the number of fact sheets in line with advice and changed the approach to fact sheets.

Actions from previous meeting

- Briefing on Community Benefits – AusNet noted this is in the agenda for discussion tonight.
- AusNet provided an update on how member feedback had been considered by the technical specialists who presented on various topics, eg bushfires with consideration

to comments from CCG members. It was stated that feedback was useful in highlighting local considerations that helped subject matter experts to further refine reports.

Examples of this included;

- Feedback regarding landholder compensation and benefits and issues of fairness was acknowledged and it was mentioned that AusNet will expand further and provide an update on **land initiatives** within this meeting.
- Transport routes have been reviewed to minimise road impacts.

Traffic management planning

- Participants raised concerns about how local businesses, especially farming enterprises (including livestock and equipment logistics), will maintain continuity during project works. AusNet confirmed that traffic management plans will be implemented, with provisions for safe passage to ensure minimal disruption.
- AusNet noted that a series of conditions, including business mitigation strategies, will be in place to support affected enterprises.

ACTION: AusNet to email responses to open action about transport impact assessment

- CCG members raised concerns about the project's primary focus being on 'the project' rather than the local community. One member reiterated they felt the project team needed to genuinely listen and act on community concerns.
- AusNet added that AusNet had reviewed biosecurity and discussed this directly with farmers and worked with contractors, highlighting there is still room to do more to benefit the community. They stated that the community are being invited to actively participate and encouraged them to do so.
- CCG community member expressed that despite claims by the project that community feedback was considered, Chapter 4 of the EES lacks a clear local focus, overlooking key concerns raised since 2020.
- CCG community member stated that AusNet's briefing of contractors regarding scoping requirements was not adequate and should have been done previously.

PROJECT UPDATE (GERARD CAREW)

Land access

- New landholder compensation benefits package was discussed. Based on feedback, easement proposals didn't go far enough. Landholders felt that they should be getting more benefits. Offers for easements (OFEs) - open for negotiation.
- CCG community members expressed concerns over easement, and potential for easement to increase beyond width of 70 metres.
- Gerard commented that he did not believe that the easement could go wider, but he would confirm.

ACTION: Gerard to confirm easement and if legal detail within the OFE and if it specifically allows for potential future widening to may occur.

- Gerard confirmed a new benefit above the compensation payments has been introduced in direct response to community feedback – a Voluntary Hosting Benefit.

- Concerns from a CCG community member about noise and dust impacts to thousands of people in the community during construction.
- Gerard confirmed there will likely be a significantly impacted neighbour program announcement by State Government. CCG community member emphasised that the project is also impacting the broader community and wants more information on traffic movements in the region.
- Mark explained that AusNet had how made a submission was made to the State Government's draft guidelines for Significantly Impacted Neighbours. The draft guidelines proposed payments to neighbouring dwellings within 400 metres of an easement. AusNet had advocated for the guidelines to be expanded to accommodate dwellings within 1km of a transmission easement
- Another CCG member expressed concerns regarding impacts to houses due to vibrations. Mark reiterated there will be benefits to immediate landholders, and that issues such as road impact would be subject to VicRoads conditions, dilapidation deeds with councils and other measures.

Land access

- Voluntary Hosting Benefit was discussed. Gerard explained if individuals sign a land access agreement, it will bring forward compensation earlier and confirmed that individuals won't lose any compensation, as long as done before the EES approval period. He clarified if individuals want an early payment of 20 percent, they can receive this. There is still eligibility to receive benefit after June 30, 2025.
- A CCG community member raised concerns that text messages implied there was an urgency to do this prior to June 30, 2025.
- Gerard confirmed that if AusNet sign landholders earlier for a Land Access Agreement it does not mean you are signing over to the project. It is access primarily for cultural and land planning assessments, just for the initial access to their property- reminding CCG members the project isn't approved yet.
- Some discussion and confusion on whether the project is categorised as "anticipated" or "committed" by CCG community members. Gerard confirmed by definition it is "anticipated".
- CCG community member questioned whether AusNet is under government pressure to get more landowners signed. Gerard clarified that AusNet is expected to progress the project and that getting the land secured through voluntary agreement is why AusNet lobbied government to improve compensation and benefits available to landholders.

EES update & communication

- EES documents are with the Planning Minister; exhibition is anticipated to begin next month. Statutory exhibition period is generally six weeks but has been extended to eight weeks for the WRL project.
- CCG community members emphasised need for clearer communication; Carlee confirmed advance notice will be provided two weeks prior to exhibition and information will be available to help the community navigate the process via Engage

Victoria, which is the State Government’s engagement platform and is mandated to be used for the EES process.

- CCG community member highlighted importance of AusNet directly communicating with the community via newsletter and they also suggested providing pre-recorded webinars on the website to explain the EES; Carlee confirmed a video will be available that explains how to navigate the EES, and online meetings will be made available to interested people seeking to discuss EES topics with a subject matter expert.
- Gerard noted EES chapters have been restructured, and a summary booklet has been developed.
- Discussion about the need for **additional exhibition venues, particularly along the transmission line route**; Mark mentioned discussions have been happening with the Local Government to ensure accessibility to EES documents.

ACTION- Carlee to share feedback with team that members suggest video/online to discuss EES (ie. High-level summary)

ACTION- Carlee to review EES display locations and potential for additional locations directly along transmission route.

Agenda item 3	Presentation: Undergrounding - Barton Napier
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Technology fundamentals

- Overview of technology fundamentals provided including discussion about electric power transmission, AC and DC, HVAC and HVDC transmission circuit configurations (asymmetrical monopoles, symmetrical monopoles and bipoles). Bipoles comprising two power cables and a metallic return cable provide greater security. Bipoles and symmetrical monopoles (two power cables) are being used in more recent interconnectors.
- Because of the very high capacity required for WRL, a HVAC underground solution would require more cables to manage the load than a HVDC underground solution.
- Concerns from some CCG community members about additional terminal stations hooking into the proposed overhead transmission line and “industrialising the landscape”. This was discussed in detail.

Underground components

- Barton showed the components of an underground transmission line using HVAC and HVDC technologies. Barton shared visual images of each technology including arrangement of transmission circuits and how generators can connect to the circuits, arrangement of cables in trenches, cable joint pits (if required), converter stations and transition stations.

- A HVAC solution would require three phases each with three cables. The required double circuit would need 18 cables, 9 for each circuit. A HVDC solution would require two circuits each with three cables if bipoles were used, i.e. six cables in total. If symmetrical monopoles were used, four circuits each with two cables would be required, eight cables in total.
- Barton showed photos of cable joint pits which are about 10 metres long by 2.5 metres wide and about 2 m deep noting that some HVAC and HVDC cables are joined and direct buried where the soil resistivity (potential for the soil to dissipate heat generated by current flowing through the cables) is acceptable. The photos which included a worker gave an indication of the size of the cable joint pits. Size concerns raised by a CCG community member. Barton clarified that the size and number of cable joint pits, if required, is dependent on the technology (HVAC or HVDC) and HVDC configuration (symmetrical monopoles or bipoles).

Underground route and construction:

- Significant commentary and questions from CCG regarding underground routes and construction methods.
- Barton presented a conceptual HVDC solution for the project as agreed by AusNet's and Moorabool Shire Council's technical experts.
- Barton explained that while undergrounding is technically feasible and a conceptual HVDC solution has been developed, it is not possible for this project due to the time required to design and procure an underground project which is not simply replacing the overhead transmission line with underground cables. Underground cables are bespoke designs, as are converter stations with both having long lead times; currently estimated to be four to eight years based on manufacturer advice.
- Barton used visual imagery to explain that terrain is a significant constraint and that it is not possible to follow existing transmission lines for their entire length necessitating routes away from the existing transmission lines and proposed route in sections. It was emphasised there are a range of different factors that need to be considered in developing an underground project. Debate continued about the requirements for and merits of overhead vs underground with community members.
- Examples of underground projects (Murraylink, Viking Link, Basslink, and Marinus Link) were provided along with a comparison against WRL for context including purpose, capacity, voltage, configuration, length and construction corridor and easement requirements (where known).

- Barton explained that transmission lines are designed and operated considering the single contingency event, which is the maximum load that can be lost if a transmission circuit fails without affecting the stability of the transmission network and security of electricity supply. Currently, the single contingency event for the HVAC overhead transmission line is 650MW and 750MW if a HVDC solution was adopted.
- Barton provided an overview of Basslink (600MW interconnector between Tasmania and Victoria) and Marinus Link (1500MW interconnector between Tasmania and Victoria) for which the Minister for Planning has published her assessment of the EIS/EES prepared for that project.
- Partial underground. Barton outlined the work done to identify and assess a partial underground solution at Darley including potential routes and required infrastructure considering the technical and environmental constraints.

Cost

- A comparison of underground and overhead costs based on five separate studies (Amplitude, AusNet, Transgrid, NSW Parliament and VicGrid) was shared with the group. The studies found that a HVDC underground solution is at least 3 to 4 times the cost of the proposed HVAC overhead transmission line, with a HVAC underground solution at least 10 times the cost of the proposed transmission line.
- Comment from community member that transmission tower images presented by AusNet are not correct and in future these should be those that are proposed for this project.

Agenda item 4	Community Benefit Sharing – AusNet - Mark
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- Mark acknowledged that AusNet is at the start of community benefits sharing journey. Highlighted there are different streams of benefits and a social value framework to provide direction on areas that benefits could be applied. Initial community benefit projects are starting to be trialled. AusNet has adopted a place-based approach to respond to community need.
- Discussed legacy benefits and balancing with grassroots benefits. He mentioned communities have told AusNet they don't want to see "cheap and cheerful", AusNet will respond to community feedback where reasonable. If the project is approved there will be a dedicated Community Benefit Fund that will be co-designed with community and have independent facilitator. Key issues currently identified as priorities include

telecommunications, blackspots, housing and accommodation, access to education, environment support, access to childcare and others.

- AusNet is working with government on the Significantly Impacted Neighbour Payment Scheme and various other stakeholders including Traditional Owners, Local Councils and community organisations.
- CCG community member raised concerns about accommodation for workers. Mark mentioned it will be a planned process, and details and locations will be provided in the EES.
- Industry and subcontractor engagement at a local level was discussed with AusNet wanting to prioritise the involvement of local businesses if the project is approved.
- AusNet advocated to AEMO to release some benefits to community ahead of the project approval, now noting that they can spend up to \$15m.
- Case study of Ballarat Community Health – AusNet worked directly with BCH to undertake a feasibility study to reduce energy costs and had been able to invest in solar panels and Federal Govt funded batteries to assist BCH to action the feasibility study and reduce energy costs. BCH is directing the energy cost savings into front line service delivery for communities in Moorabool, Pyrenees, Ballarat and other council areas. Other community health organisations have expressed similar interest and AusNet is looking at a model to replicate it along the entire route.
- Mark emphasised there is opportunity to support benefits projects, and AusNet was also cognisant that the project is divisive, and the preference was to respond to community need and interest.
- CCG community member highlighted mental health support as a priority, and suggested TIACS (<https://www.tiacs.org>). The members suggested community benefit projects need to be robust and appropriate to local communities, highlighting that communities may not feel connected to some projects, such as the BCH example.
- Catherine (Moorabool Shire Council) highlighted council involvement with communities as an enabler. She emphasised to CCG member that if there is a community initiative or need not being met, Council can assist and navigate an arrangement with AusNet, Council and community groups.

ACTION: CCG community members to contact AusNet if they have community needs/potential projects they would like considered for funding

- Discussion covered the response since the new landholder packages were launched. Gerard said there had been good conversations; noting that the community is curious. Current package included \$120K for 5 days of access and \$2k per day, capped.
- Longer term option agreement is also an option and is creating meaningful conversations- some signed and some are under negotiation.
- Gerard reiterated that **AusNet is contracted to deliver project and work with landowners to help determine what is best for them.** There is a window of time before project approval where you can negotiate a position for yourself, AND still object to the project. AusNet can try and get the best deal for landowners and community.

Agenda item 6	Closing items
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- Cath raised whether the meeting should be the final meeting or if another should be schedule.
- CCG members expressed interest in one1 more meeting during the exhibition period to share reactions to the EES. This could be achieved as an online meeting.
- No final decision made. AusNet to advise.

Action items

#	Who	Action/Item
1	AusNet	Bushfire messaging be reviewed/checked on website and Carlee to respond to group regarding status.
2	AusNet	Responses to open questions about transport impact assessment to be sent to members
3	AusNet	Easement- confirm easement and if widening could occur in future
4	AusNet	EES video/online option- Determine internally and advise group
5	AusNet Community CCG members	EES display locations- CCG community members to provide feedback of potential additional locations to Carlee. Carlee to review locations.
6	Community CCG members	Community Projects/funding - reach out to AusNet with suggested priority community projects