

Meeting Minutes

Victoria NSW Interconnector West

Meeting title:	VNI West Community Consultative Group Meeting	Date:	29 August 2024
Location:	Jerilderie Library	Time:	10:00am – 1:00pm
Chairperson:	Brendan Blakeley		
Attendees:			
VNI West Project Team - Transgrid			
Colin Mayer	Project Director		
Nathan Menser	Acting Community and Stakeholder Engagement Manager		
Paul McFadyen	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Lead		
Wardia Kessal	Environment Manager		
Bob Crawford	Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council		
Mick Lalor	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service - Online		
Donald Bull	Landholder		
Ben Doran	Transgrid		
Peter O'Shannassy	NSW Local Land Services - Murray		
Gary Stoll	Murrumbidgee Council		
Bruce Rollinson	Landholder		
Sarah Ryan	Murray River Council		
Mark Dalzell	Edward River Council		
David Crew	Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre		
Apologies			
Aaron Atkinson	Transgrid		
Alison Glenn	NSW Farmers Bunaloo Branch		
Michael Chalmers	Ricegrowers' Association of Australia - Wakool Branch		
Leon Atkinson	Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council		
Trevor Clarke	Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council		
Rose Dunn	Deniliquin Local Aboriginal Land Council		
John Kerr	Moama Local Aboriginal Land Council		
Shannon Sampson	Community member		
Maisie Moore	Wamba Wamba Local Aboriginal Land Council		

Acknowledgment of Country

On behalf of the group, Brendan Blakeley acknowledged the Wamba Wamba and Barappa Barappa/Pereppa Pereppa, Traditional Owners of Deniliquin and its surrounding areas.

Meeting proceedings

Agenda item	Summary notes
1. Welcome, introductions and housekeeping and review of previous minutes	<p>Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves.</p> <p>Chair reviewed action items and minutes from previous meeting were accepted.</p>
2. What are you hearing?	<p>Each Council gave a short statement in response to the VNI West Scoping Report</p> <p>Mark Dalzell, Director Infrastructure, Edward River Council</p> <p>Council doesn't want to see issues raised and not properly addressed in the EIS. We don't want to see issues deferred because they need another report.</p> <p>There are concerns around the impact to council assets particularly large transport and logistics. We know we will enter into agreements with Transgrid about impact on both asphalt and gravel roads. That will give us a legacy asset. We have a network of sealed and gravel roads, and the project will be adding to it. What's the impact of another 50-100km of roads to be maintained. If we're inheriting assets there will be an ongoing maintenance liability that small Councils with limited resources will require ongoing support to fund.</p> <p>The route is going to impact people, Transgrid needs to talk to people. We know Transgrid only wants to use compulsory acquisition as a last resort. We want to make sure the engagement is professionally sound and comes from a good spot. We really hope that the EIS is detailed and sound.</p> <p>Sarah Ryan, Director Community and Economic Development, Murray River Council</p> <p>Councils' stance on all projects is our response to the cumulative impacts. Our initial stance was supporting undergrounding and the reasons for that were to reduce the impact to agricultural land, our region's natural beauty and tourism, and mitigation of social impact.</p> <p>Communities in general think everything is Transgrid. We're finding out very late that Transgrid is out engaging. Communities are turning a blind eye due to fatigue.</p> <p>This project will bring challenges with water, waste and roads, on top of impacts to housing, police, RNs, aged care. Dealing with the cumulative impacts of all the projects in the LGA has become a fulltime role and we are not resourced for that.</p> <p>There is a community divide – for and against. Issues include fear around spray drift, insurance costs. It's causing friction in our communities.</p> <p>How do we upskill our local contractors to take advantage of the opportunities, because we know from experience a lot of them don't have the capability to be able to get on the panels.</p> <p><i>There was some discussion amongst the group about the coordination of logistics amongst the projects and how that issue can be addressed.</i></p> <p>Bob Crawford (BC): We're going to have transport huge amounts of material and those trucks carrying those turbines, those roads are not built for that kind of activity. Pre-delivery can we spread this out, and get this out before we need it to lessen the impact? Can we have longer lead times on these activities so we can make sure that they are coordinated and impacts upon communities can be equitably managed?</p> <p>Donald Bull (DB): Hardinge st/Davidson that side of town</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Mark Dalzell (MD): TFNSW may be running road development on state roads Colin Mayer (CM): there is an opportunity to improve on what's happening with PEC at Dinawan</p> <p>Garry Stoll, Director Planning, Community, Development and infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council</p> <p>I'd like to reinforce what Sarah and Mark have said. Looking at cumulative impact on roads, biodiversity, waste and water. We emphasised our roads and infrastructure have developed to meet the demands of our community. We have had this dumped this on us. It will have a significant impact on our town. We feel that we are getting bribed and paid off with these community benefits schemes. But it's missing the point, the federal and state governments should be coming to us with funding to ensure that roads and telecommunications are upgraded to support the these really significant projects rather than the current situation of us having to negotiate ad hoc funding with a series of individual proponents. The provision of sealed roads to support a very high level of activity across the region and serve the community and the projects. REZs are regional and very significant investment small councils shouldn't be fighting with each other to ensure the infrastructure to support these major projects is provided. The state and federal government should be fixing these issues, but no one is talking about it. It's a national problem that requires a national solution. Even one of these projects alone is a major task for a small council let alone several of them over a short timeframe.</p> <p>Rural councils are struggling to get staff for our day-to-day business let alone the load these projects are placing on us. The government needs to be funding positions within councils to help us address the work they are placing on us in responding to EIS and planning applications as well as make the most of any opportunities these projects can provide.</p> <p>BC: Off sets, there needs to be a discussion about off sets. GS: Council has lost the ability to influence these projects. Roads, Developer contributions scheme, all gone. CM: Hay Shire Council example of preparing a coordinated response to projects. SR: We would love to do that, but we have no money and are on a sustainability drive, but we are not able to use rate payers dollars for that. CM: We want to know what the blockers are for Councils and what we can do to support and assist BC: Transport! Roads upgrades Chair: So your concerns are about the capacity as individual councils to respond, and the ability to coordinate regionally to get a greater voice? GS: The government is committing \$50mill to upgrade the road from Newcastle to Dubbo for Central-West Orana REZ. We need the same here. Bruce Rollinson (BR): The REZ is a national policy CM: It's hard, but we will keep trying. Those projects have to connect to us. We have the ability to start having those conversations with those developers. BR: Garry and I saw Helen Dalton. She doesn't have much influence. Sussan Ley is the same. Helen Dalton wants to help but doesn't know how. Roads are a federal and state issue, they should be financing these roads themselves. Along the corridor those roads need to be substantially upgraded. McLennons Bore Road is being used for PEC, Mabins Well Road will be used for VNI. We are seeing a lot of wear and tear. It shouldn't be left up to councils to try and</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>organise this. They don't have the staff to do it. But trying to get people to listen? We're major stakeholders, we collectively need to have a strong voice.</p> <p>BB: So what you are saying is that it shouldn't just be the market doing this on a project by project basis but all levels of government working together to ensure there is coordination and support for a series of projects that in this region may be worth around \$5-10 billion dollars over the next 10 years.</p> <p>DB: Would it possible to get a delegation to go to Canberra and try to get an audience with relevant Ministers?</p> <p>MD: That would be good to go through the Mayors' for that</p> <p>David Crew (DC): Just in terms of agreeing with collaboration. I haven't heard anything from council about the impact on cultural heritage, and impact or benefits for indigenous communities. You need to do this and that to support the EIS and surveys but there's no conversations about whether there is capacity to do that.</p> <p>SR: We have no capacity to even think about those broader and larger issues, it's very reactive.</p> <p>DC: We need to fundamentally look at the needs and how we are going to prepare for decades ahead.</p> <p>SR: Yesterday EnergyCo talked about their investments they have four areas of investment: Indigenous, Employment, Community and legacy infrastructure. They told us that they have an Indigenous consultative committee – we'd never heard about it and we don't know who is on it.</p> <p>CM: Senator Perrin Davey is also quite active.</p> <p>BB: Coordination and advocacy how do you actually make sure that it works best for this community?</p> <p>BR: Roads and telecoms along the corridor. If it became a federal road that would help resource council to maintain it.</p> <p>GS: We do some of the maintenance on those federal roads, we do the roadworks, which means we can employ people and they pay us to maintain it.</p> <p>Peter O'Shannassy (PO): Roads, the junction points and corners are usually spots that are TSRs and fall into our jurisdiction. We've already had requests to widen intersections. That falls on us to arrange cultural heritage adding more pressure to LALCs/RAPS. It's an impost on a what is a very small team all of them who are doing operational work as well.</p> <p>GS: We've been careful to include a requirement that they can't remove water from dams on TSRs without authority.</p> <p>PO: A lot of our dams are supplied by bores that will be impacted. Mabins Well Road will be a prime example. That's fine for powerlines which are specified under the act, but with widening roads it becomes a bigger issue. I could employ someone just to respond to those. Also, we're really keen to be involved in any off sets that are done. We have a huge seed bank in the area.</p> <p>CM: There will be off sets. There is a hierarchy of off sets...</p> <p>BC: You were talking about long term sustainability (addressing David Crew). I was wondering if Indigenous people and Australian Carbon Credits Units (ACCU)....</p> <p>DC: There is a lot of unutilised land assets and what could come from innovative and generative stuff we could have</p> <p>BC: I was interested in that discussion on water rights and I was thinking ACCUs for that process, so just encouraging you to think about that</p> <p>Wardia Kessal (WK): As part of EIS cultural values assessment on spiritual values to capture and assess, and any potential initiatives that we can preserve and conserve them into the future.</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>DC: A recent yarning circle took place where a lot of those values would have been discussed, but no one would have been there to capture them</p>
<p>3. Project Director's update</p>	<p>CM: The project has been declared as Critical State Significant Infrastructure. That does have implications for council. Kicks of EIS process</p> <p>Procurement – We are on the brink of going to talk to contractors. Another 4-6 weeks of planning for budgets then we will kick off those conversations.</p> <p>Capabilities and skill development. All the companies we are talking to are mostly international. There is a massive skill shortage in Australia, therefore a huge opportunity for skills development.</p> <p>The Environment team is working on the Environmental Impact Statement. Very close to getting 200m corridor. A much better process has helped us understand communities and potential impacts.</p> <p>Property team has issued letters to around 20 landholders so far.</p> <p>DD: Wind farms and Mabins Well Road, which side of the road will you be going on? North or south?</p> <p>Colin: There is a certain distance a turbine needs to be away from a TL. Clearance and wake effect are a constraint.</p> <p>CM: Until the Southwest REZ Access Scheme has concluded we don't know which developers to work with, so we're making sure we're talking to all of them.</p> <p>BC: Why doesn't this group write to parliamentarians and raise these issues?</p> <p>GS: We've written two letters to the Minister for Planning and received no response.</p> <p>ACTION: Draft letter to circulate amongst group representatives for signing and sending to appropriate state and Federal representatives</p> <p>GS: One of EnergyCo's funding programs is training and education. We have a 0% unemployment in this town. What would be helpful is a trainee town planner, engineer etc that could do their final year here, while also helping council deal with the influx of applications and studies.</p> <p>CM: It's not without precedent that we can fund these types of programs. We are doing this with Engineering university places in Wagga.</p> <p>BB: There is also precedent in other sectors for programs like this</p> <p>CM: The lines are meeting at the border and there will be an update in September.</p> <p>DB: Where's Victoria up to?</p> <p>CM: They have their Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process before they can say anything. In September they will announce their preferred route</p> <p>BC: I'm really interested in the vortex issue – you must have an influence on the developers?</p> <p>CM: if you want to find out more about the requirements of how transmission lines and windfarms interact we can provide you with the guidelines that we are using.</p> <p>ACTION: Distribute Energy Networks Australia – Guidelines for wind turbines proximity to electricity transmission lines</p> <p>Environment Update</p> <p>WK: Outlined the process of refining the route. We prepared an addendum scoping report – we've added a couple of bubbles and currently working on getting that 200m. We will refine further as part of detailed design.</p> <p>We should receive the Final Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) in the next few weeks.</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Environmental Protections Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) Referral - This project constitutes a “controlled action”</p> <p>ACTION: Critical State significant Infrastructure Declaration</p> <p>Aboriginal Focus Groups – Expressions of Interest from RAPs for surveys and cultural heritage work. Opportunities during cultural values assessment</p> <p>DC: One of the challenges with RAPs is the matter of ensuring appropriate representation.</p> <p>The community that is here is going to have to deal with people coming in from elsewhere for the work.</p> <p>Engagement Update</p> <p>Nathan Menser (NM): This is an indicative map of the information that is shared with landowners to carry forward to discussions confirming locations of towers and tracks and then valuations. There is an internal review of these maps amongst the key workstreams prior to issue.</p> <p>DB: What’s the rough estimate of time to get down to 70m?</p> <p>NM: 200m is carried through the EIS, and the details of the actual 70-metre easement is individually negotiated.</p> <p>CCG Recruitment</p> <p>Reem Nasr (RN) briefly discussed the opportunity to recruit up to two new members to the group.</p> <p>The group discussed the prospect and councils requested that any recruitment that occur take place after council elections. The group also discussed the need for recruitment and ensuring there is appropriate representation from across the whole alignment and from various groups.</p> <p>PO: Western Murray Land Improvement Group would be valuable to have represented.</p> <p>RN: They were invited to apply and declined. More than happy to ask them again.</p> <p>DB: How long is the group meant to go for?</p> <p>RN: The group is intended to run for the life of the project, however it is usually phased, so a new group would be recruited and coordinated during delivery by the contractor, for example. At this stage we’re looking at up to another two years.</p>
4. Community benefits and Investments	Paul McFadyen outlined the recent engagement with the community on the development of the community benefits and investment plan.
Wrap and Meeting close	<p>Chair: Thanked members for their input. He asked that members pencil in 27 November 2024 at Deniliquin for the next meeting.</p> <p>He also requested that if members wanted presentations on other aspects of the project to have a chat with him or Reem.</p>

Action items

Agenda item	Description	Person responsible	Status
2. What are you hearing	<p>ACTION: Letter to be drafted on behalf of group outlining issues and requesting coordination of activities. Chair to draft letter</p> <p>Draft to be circulated to group by Secretary</p>	Chair	In progress

Agenda item	Description	Person responsible	Status
3. Project Director's update	ACTION: Distribute Energy Networks Australia – Guidelines for wind turbines proximity to electricity transmission lines	Secretary	In progress
	ACTION: Link to CSSI Declaration	Secretary	Completed

Resources

Item	Link
Critical State Significant Infrastructure Declaration	https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/pdf/asmade/sl-2024-242
Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991	https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1991-022
VNI West CPA1 Determination	https://www.aer.gov.au/documents/aer-determination-transgrid-vni-west-stage-1-early-works-contingent-project-may-2024 (PDF 648Kb)
VNI West Contingent Application (CPA) 1	https://www.aer.gov.au/documents/transgrid-vni-west-cpa-stage-1-a1-principal-application-31-january-2024 (PDF 1.28MB)
Preferred Route Report	https://www.transgrid.com.au/media/5whhsuo2/vni-west-preferred-route-report-march-2024.pdf (PDF 4.7MB)
Draft Route Report	https://www.transgrid.com.au/media/1vbfkt2d/vni_west_draft_route_report-29-january-2024.pdf (PDF 23.3MB)
Preferred Corridor Report	https://www.transgrid.com.au/media/0wue2k4h/vni-west-preferred-corridor-report-october-2023.pdf (PDF 3.66 MB)
Draft Corridor Report	https://www.transgrid.com.au/media/af5d3pry/ps135761-env-rep-001-reva_corridor_rpt_v2-2.pdf (PDF 39.34 MB)
Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission Documents	https://www.transgrid.com.au/projects-innovation/vni-west#Regulatory-Investment-Test-for-Transmission--RIT-T-
RIT-T Consultation documents	https://aemo.com.au/initiatives/major-programs/vni-west/stakeholder-consultation
State Significant Infrastructure	https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/development-and-assessment/state-significant-infrastructure
Assure Programs	<p>The service is confidential and anonymous. Transgrid does not receive any information about who uses these services.</p> <p>There is no cost to landowners in accessing this service.</p> <p>How to make an appointment</p> <p>You can book an appointment by calling Assure on 1800 808 374, or you can request an appointment online.</p> <p>When you call Assure, please let the team know that you are from Transgrid, and the business unit is “Landowners.” This will ensure you are able to get the support you need. You are not expected to provide the reason – this is a conversation saved for your session with the psychologist.</p>

Item	Link
	In addition, the NSW Centre for Property Acquisition has free support and counselling services available to any landowners affected by an acquisition. For more information, call 1300 029 146 or visit their website .

Attachments

Attachment	Format
Glossary	PDF
Transgrid Slides	PDF

Next meeting

Date:	Wednesday, 27 November 2024	Time:	10:00am – 1:00pm
Location:	Deniliquin	Chairperson:	Brendan Blakeley