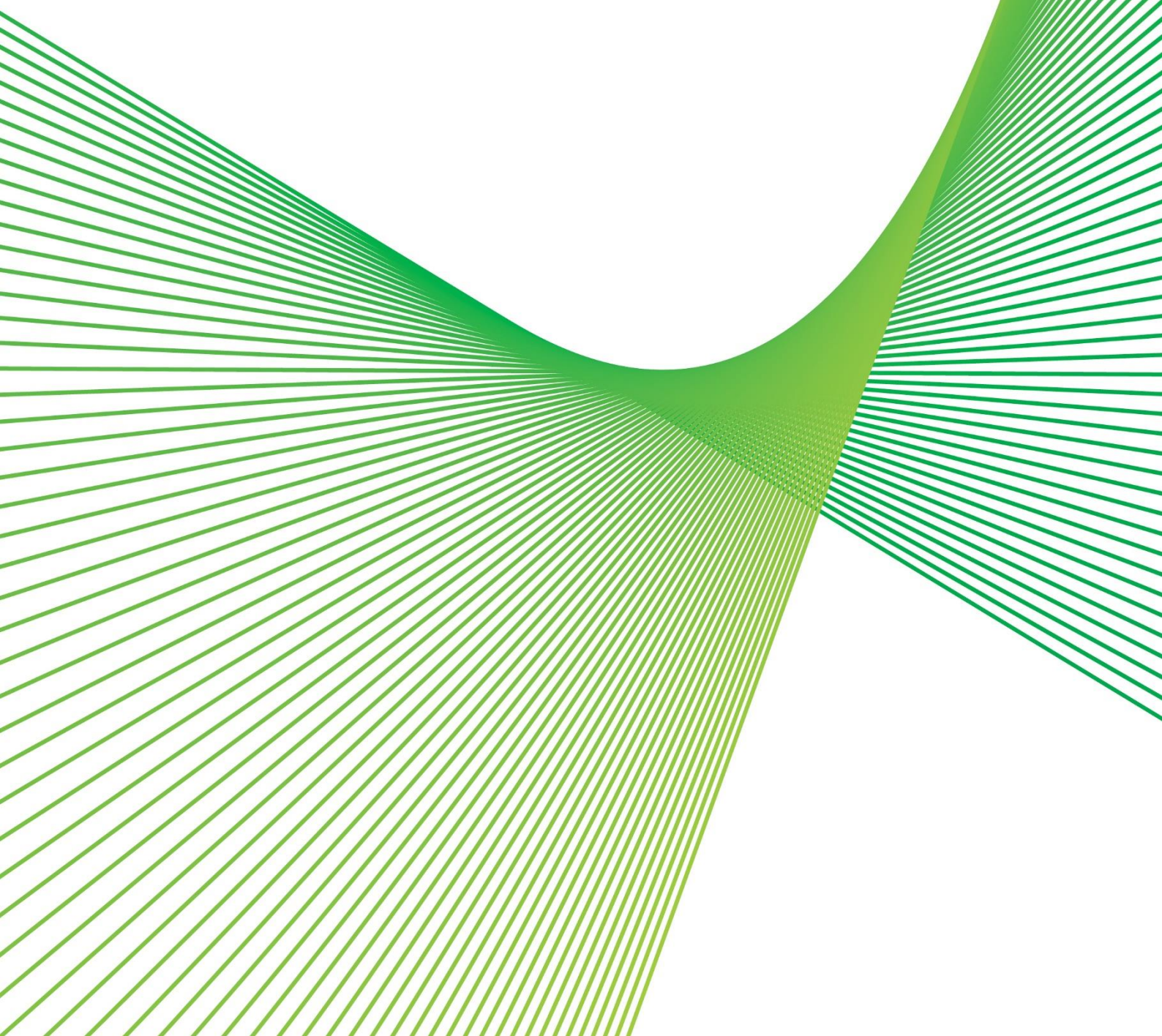


What We Heard Report

HumeLink Community Information Sessions

EIS Public Exhibition – September/October 2023



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Purpose

The purpose of the *What We Heard* report is to capture and share information and issues discussed at key engagement events. The reports are published on the HumeLink project website for those not able to attend an event, as a record of engagement and to ensure transparency. They are also passed onto the project team for consideration during project development.

Summary

The in-person and online HumeLink Community Information Sessions (CIS) were designed to engage with the general community and provide landowners, impacted communities, local government, and businesses with information on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the submission process during the EIS public exhibition period. The public exhibition period commenced on Wednesday, 30 August for an initial 28 days, ending on Wednesday 27 September. On 20 September, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) advertised a 14-day extension of the public exhibition period, ending Tuesday 10 October 2023.

The CIS were held over three weeks during the public exhibition period, between 4 September and 28 September 2023, at locations across the project alignment. The public exhibition period provided landowners, the community, government agencies and other interested stakeholders with an opportunity to learn more about the EIS and how to make a formal submission on the EIS.

The format of these sessions and the content shared considered feedback from Community Consultative Group (CCG) meetings and key stakeholders regarding the HumeLink project's engagement with the local communities. This includes the CIS locations, which were determined through consultation with the CCGs during the early planning stages of the project.

The sessions focused on the EIS public exhibition, in particular sharing information on the different topics included in the EIS, the exhibition period and ensuring attendees were able to make an informed submission if they wished to do so.

The CIS offered a two-way communication opportunity allowing stakeholders to meet and discuss the project with key members of the HumeLink team including representatives from the engineering, environmental, property, and community and stakeholder engagement team. Collateral available at each session included:

- Printed copies of the body of the EIS
- EIS summary report
- Printed copies of 19 EIS factsheets
- Printed materials detailing the submission process
- Computers with online access to view the Digital EIS and the NSW Planning Portal
- USBs pre-loaded with the full EIS
- Printed maps of the entire alignment
- Posters with key information and visual impressions of HumeLink.

Three additional drop-in style sessions were organised exclusively for CCG members to engage with members of the project team one-on-one.

The EIS community engagement activities were advertised through a cross-channel campaign across print, digital, radio and social media. An Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) was also sent to HumeLink project subscribers, and the *HumeLink July 2023 Newsletter* was distributed via letterbox drop to over 11,000 recipients within a 10 kilometre radius of the project footprint, advertising the upcoming public exhibition period.

Transgrid's Remote Access Communication Hub (RACH) was also set up outside several of the information session venues to increase the visibility and accessibility of the sessions. RACH also visited a number of individual properties to provide community members with an additional way to engage with project team members.

The HumeLink team held pre-EIS community information sessions as part of the engagement in the lead up to the public exhibition of the EIS. The first round of pre-EIS public exhibition sessions were held in September and October 2022, with 89 people attending 17 sessions. These sessions provided an overview of the project and EIS process. A second round of events was held in February and March 2023, with 16 sessions and a total of 67 people attending. These events focused on potential visual impacts from the project as well as potential impacts on land use. A third round of sessions were held in May 2023, with 44 people attending 11 sessions focusing on potential noise and vibration impacts.

During the EIS public exhibition, the HumeLink project held 19 in-person CISs and three CCG information sessions with a total of 59 people attending. In addition to in-person events, three EIS webinars were held with 14 attendees across all sessions.

Additionally, the HumeLink project team received community enquiries through multiple channels including the Registered Environmental Assessment Practitioner (REAP), a qualified and skilled environmental assessment practitioner who provides a quality assurance review of the EIS prior to lodgement to DPE, the 1800 community phone number and the HumeLink project email.

This document outlines the feedback received during the EIS public exhibition engagement activities, as well as the key themes and common issues raised by stakeholders and the community. The topics raised most across all engagement activities and enquiries during the EIS public exhibition include:

- General EIS process
- Engagement during and prior to the EIS public exhibition
- Bushfire risk and management
- Construction methodology
- The Green Hills alignment
- General route identification process including undergrounding versus overhead.

This report summarises the key themes identified across all EIS public exhibition engagement activities and provides analysis for each individual session. The community feedback received from engagement activities will inform the project's next steps including the preparation and lodgement of the Submissions Report and Amendment Report. To read more about the project's next stages please find the [November Newsletter](#).

Engagement approach

1.1. Community Information Sessions (CIS)

The September CIS and CCG information sessions were drop-in style, where members of the project team were available over a two-hour period to speak directly with community members and stakeholders. The sessions were held during the daytime and evening to reach broad range of community members.

The CIS were held at central locations and at each venue information was displayed around the room on corflute display boards to allow for group movement and flow. Large maps of the project footprint were displayed in the centre of the room to facilitate collaborative discussions.

Project team members were available to explain the project and answer questions in small groups or with individuals. As part of the set-up the community engagement team had two workstations with a laptop and internet access along with a large screen. This enabled community members to view the Digital EIS and access the NSW DPE Major Projects Planning Portal for more information or make a submission (if desired).

1.2. Webinars

The webinars focused on the EIS public exhibition and how to make a submission, as well as EIS topics of interest raised by the webinar attendees. The style and format of the webinars ensured attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss queries about the specialist studies presented. The webinars were held on Zoom, ensuring ease of use and access for community members and stakeholders.

1.3. Remote Access Communication Hub (RACH)

RACH is a portable community information hub with the capacity for remote and off-road travel. It is equipped with satellite connectivity for remote internet access, allowing visitors to access the HumeLink interactive map via a touch screen, as well as search and print-out additional maps or information on request. RACH was used to engage with communities and landowners in remote locations across the HumeLink alignment and at local events during the public exhibition period. RACH was also present at in-person events to increase the visibility and accessibility of the sessions. RACH was a beneficial tool during the EIS exhibition as it allowed the project team to visit landowners who were unable to attend CIS and webinars. The team visited two directly impacted landowners in the Tumut area to discuss the EIS submission process and additional topics listed below:

- Visual impact assessment
- Bushfires
- Tower construction process
- Agricultural impacts
- Transgrid legacy opportunities
- Off-easement access tracks.

1.4. Supporting communications and collateral

Factsheets summarising the EIS specialist studies were available at each CIS, including a factsheet outlining the EIS process and how to make a submission. Printed copies of the main body of the EIS

(including EIS chapters and appendices) and copies of the EIS summary report were available for attendees to take with them. Additional hard copies of the main body of the EIS were provided to community members upon request. For individuals with unstable internet connection, pre-loaded USBs containing the EIS, and all the associated Technical Reports including the Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR), were available at the in-person CIS or provided on request.

1.5. Advertising

The EIS public exhibition period was advertised in the *HumeLink July 2023 Newsletter*, which was emailed to over 800 project subscribers, impacted landowners, local information distributors (local organisations which distribute project updates through their networks), and CCG members, and letterbox dropped to over 11,000 recipients within a 10 kilometre radius of the project footprint.

Notifications to inform impacted landowners that the EIS was on public exhibition were sent out in line with Section 181 of the [Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021](#). In addition to these communication channels, an advertisement campaign notifying impacted landowners, communities and stakeholders of the upcoming EIS public exhibition and engagement activities featured on local news outlets.

The in-person and online CIS were also advertised via an Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) which confirmed the EIS public exhibition period, detailed upcoming engagement events and outlined the collateral and resources available. The EDM was sent to 695 recipients, including CCG members, impacted landowners, and e-newsletter subscribers. A separate EDM was sent to local information distributors, with the invitation for a meeting upon request.

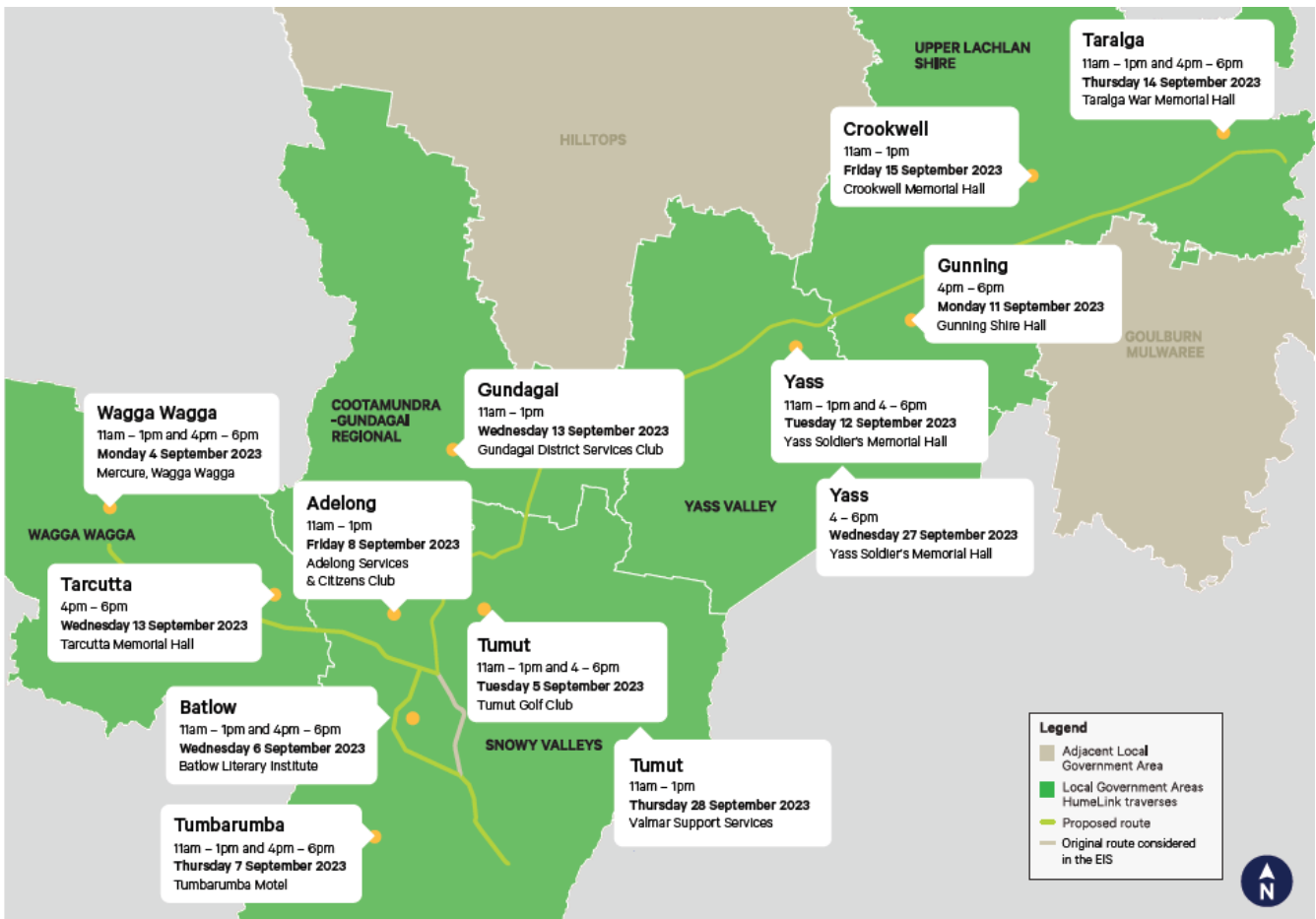
The HumeLink EIS advertising campaign was designed to raise awareness of the EIS public exhibition and events held throughout the exhibition period. This cross-channel campaign used print, digital, radio and social media to reach those who live, work, or commute through the project area, and achieve a diverse reach across demographics and media preferences.

The table below outlines the dates and locations of each CIS:

Week	Location	Date	Time	Venue
Week 1 (w/c 4 Sept 2023)	Wagga Wagga	Monday 4 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Mercure Hotel
	Wagga Wagga – CCG drop-in session	Monday 4 Sept 23	3 pm – 4 pm	Mercure Hotel
	Wagga Wagga	Monday 4 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Mercure Hotel
	Tumut - CCG drop-in session	Tuesday 5 Sept 23	10 am – 11 am	Tumut Golf Club
	Tumut	Tuesday 5 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Tumut Golf Club
	Tumut	Tuesday 5 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Tumut Golf Club
	Batlow	Wednesday 6 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Batlow Literary Institute
	Batlow	Wednesday 6 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Batlow Literary Institute
	Tumbarumba	Thursday 7 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Tumbarumba Motel
	Tumbarumba	Thursday 7 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Tumbarumba Motel

	Adelong	Friday 8 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Adelong Services, Citizens & Bowling Club
Total attendees week 1: 33				
Week 2 (w/c 11 Sept 2023)	Gunning	Monday 11 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Gunning Shire Hall
	Yass	Tuesday 12 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Yass Soldiers Memorial Hall
	Yass – CCG drop-in session	Tuesday 12 Sept 23	3 pm – 4 pm	Yass Soldiers Memorial Hall
	Yass	Tuesday 12 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Yass Soldiers Memorial Hall
	Gundagai	Wednesday 13 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Gundagai District Services Club
	Tarcutta	Wednesday 13 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Tarcutta Memorial Hall
	Taralga	Thursday 14 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Taralga War Memorial Hall
	Taralga	Thursday 14 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Taralga War Memorial Hall
	Crookwell	Friday 15 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Crookwell Memorial Hall
Total attendees week 2: 26				
Week 3 (w/c 25 Sept 2023)	Yass	Wednesday 27 Sept 23	4 pm – 6 pm	Yass Soldiers Memorial Hall
	Tumut	Thursday 28 Sept 23	11 am – 1 pm	Valmar Support Services, Tumut
Total attendees week 3: 0				
September total attendees: 59				

The map below provides an overview of the events and locations of the CIS across the project footprint:



Webinars were held on the following dates and times:

Webinar	Date	Time
1	Thursday 7 September	1:30pm – 3:00pm (AEST)
2	Thursday 14 September	1:30pm – 3:00pm (AEST)
3	Wednesday 20 September	12:00pm – 1:30pm (AEST)

Webinar total attendees: 14

Key themes

The key topics for in-person and online information sessions are outlined below, ranking from the most popular theme raised to the least:

- **General EIS process**
This included the submissions process and public exhibition timeframe, the environmental and approvals process, next steps after the public exhibition, and the EIS resources that were available, including the Digital EIS (DEIS). This theme was the most popular, raised by stakeholders across Tumut, Batlow, Tumbarumba, Gunning, Yass, Tarcutta, Taralga, Crookwell.
- **Engagement**
This was the second most popular theme throughout the CIS. Stakeholders enquired about the engagement with the broader community, near-neighbours, Aboriginal stakeholders, councils, the Rural Fire Service (RFS), Forestry Corporation NSW, and the opportunity to engage with younger demographic groups.
- **Bushfires and bushfire risk**
Bushfire risk was highlighted as a key theme and was mainly raised in the CIS at Wagga Wagga, Tumut, Batlow, Tumbarumba, and at the webinars. The community expressed concerns regarding firefighting operations and procedures, Transgrid's responsibility in the de-energisation process, the risk of bushfire ignition and windy conditions, workforce training in firefighting activities, vegetation clearance and easement maintenance.
- **Construction methodology**
Construction methodology was mostly raised by community members in the western section of the HumeLink footprint. Stakeholders expressed interest in the enabling works and upgrades required to the substations, in particular the Wagga Wagga, Maragle and Gugaa substations. Attendees were also interested in construction timeframes and methodology, process for selecting tower locations, access tracks and road use during construction, construction impacts and mitigation measures, and contractor resourcing.
- **Green Hills route and the Green Hills route announcement**
This was a popular topic raised by stakeholders in the western section of the alignment. Stakeholders enquired about the preferred Green Hills route and route refinement works. Additionally, there were ongoing conversations with affected landowners, Place Managers and Land Access Officers regarding the reduction of private landowners with the preferred western route through Green Hills State Forest. This is a new theme which emerged from this round of CIS, as the Green Hills route was announced as the preferred option shortly before the EIS public exhibition period.
- **General route identification process**
Route identification was mentioned by stakeholders in Wagga Wagga, Tumut, Batlow, Yass and on the webinars. Stakeholders expressed interest in the project alignment including corridor dimensions, route refinement and final route confirmation.
- **Undergrounding**
Undergrounding of transmission lines and the process and outcomes of the Parliament of NSW

(STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government) was mentioned by stakeholders throughout the CIS. The cost of undergrounding, constraints and impacts, and the inquiry results were topics mentioned in conversations with the project team.

- **Biodiversity impact assessment**

This was raised by stakeholders in Batlow, Yass, Crookwell and at the webinars. CIS attendees were interested in learning more about the methodology used for the biodiversity impact assessment and the project's approach to biodiversity offsets.

- **Visual impacts**

These included the visual impact assessment guidelines, rating of potential visual impact, and outcomes in the Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment (LCVIA).

- **Workforce and workforce accommodation**

This theme was raised by stakeholders across the CIS and webinars. Stakeholders enquired about workforce development including opportunities for local Aboriginal communities, location of construction compounds and workforce accommodation facilities, potential impacts on local health and medical services from the increase of construction workers, and numbers of temporary workers.

- **Cumulative impacts**

Cumulative impacts and HumeLink's relation to other energy projects in the region were questioned, in particular HumeLink's connection to Snowy 2.0, Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) and Project Energy Connect (PEC).

- **Local business opportunities** and Transgrid's **community programs**

This included questions regarding the Community Partnership Program and the Landowner assurance program.

- **Impacts on agricultural land**

Enquiries focused on the impact on local farmers due to the loss of viable farmland.

- **Transgrid legacy opportunities, and economic impacts**

These included the possibility of installing Telstra Towers and the industry approach to economic impacts.

- **Land Use and Property (LUP)**

This is an emerging theme from this round of CIS. The mapping methodology for LUP and topics relating to land erosion impacts were raised.

- **Landowner compensation**

This included general enquiries on the landowner compensation process.

- **Contractor announcement**

This included general enquiries on the contractor selection process, contractors outsourcing, and the predicted contractor announcement timeframe.

In-person sessions overview

The following section includes an overview of each in-person session and common, high-level themes which were discussed. Please note, if you feel that high-level points you raised were not highlighted in this report, please reach out to the HumeLink team on:

Telephone: Toll-free phone number: 1800 317 367

Email: humelink@transgrid.com.au

Week 1| Wagga Wagga

Session 1: Monday 4 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

CCG Session: Monday 4 September 2023, 3 pm – 4pm

Session 2: Monday 4 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- Engagement with Aboriginal elders, and the Rural Fire Service (RFS)
- Workforce development in Wagga Wagga
- Substations, such as Wagga Wagga substation modification works and the Maragle substation
- Cumulative impacts and HumeLink's relation to adjacent projects, in particular the Snowy 2.0 Transmission Connector project
- Project footprint and route refinement process, including Green Hills route
- Transgrid's landowner assurance program and mental health support
- Construction timeframe including detailed design stages, construction methodology, enabling works and construction compounds
- Concept design process and expected noise levels, including corona noise
- Contractor announcement
- Acquisition process, easement acquisition and decreasing land value
- Interest in the local business register.

Week 1| Tumut

CCG Session: Tuesday 5 September 2023, 10am – 11am

Session 1: Tuesday 5 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

Session 2: Tuesday 5 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- EIS process, how to make a submission and resources available for consultation
- Agricultural impact assessment in the Technical Report and EIS
- Land Use and Property assessment methodology
- Telecommunications hut and legacy opportunities
- Engagement with neighbouring properties, community and councils
- Access tracks and road use and upgrades during construction, including integrated approach with local suppliers
- Project approval, submission process, and next steps including the submissions report
- Social impact, particularly on workforce accommodation and local accommodation facilities
- Location of workforce accommodation facilities and proposed construction compounds
- Landowner sentiment and easement negotiations
- Construction timeframe and opportunities for industry participation
- Bushfire risk, in particular fire ignition and firefighting operations
- Tower dimensions, design and height
- Adjacent projects and cumulative impacts
- Green Hills route announcement, impacts and assessment in the EIS
- Potential impacts to Buddong waterfalls and campsite
- Accessible community consultation, advertisement of CIS and RACH
- Aviation safety.

Week 1| Batlow

Session 1: Wednesday 6 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

Session 2: Wednesday 6 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement sites and opportunities
- Vegetation clearance for construction and operation, and its impact on conservation and biodiversity
- Risk of bushfire with overhead lines and in windy areas, and Transgrid's responsibility with firefighting procedures
- Parliament of NSW (STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government)
- Compensation process for landowners including the easement acquisition and negotiation process, and landowner payments

- Green Hills route, announcement, and route refinement process
- Visual impact in State forests and vegetation clearance
- EIS process and approvals pathway
- Engagement including public exhibition engagement, engagement undertaken with younger demographics and future contractor engagement
- Agricultural impacts on local growers
- Construction timeline
- Project footprint including the Green Hills route and the Hume & Hovel track, and relation to other energy projects in the area, specifically Snowy 2.0
- Height restriction of transmission towers and tower construction process
- Biodiversity surveys and threatened flora and fauna
- Comprehensive trade-offs after construction completion
- Transgrid grants and contribution to local towns to support research and the implementation of local programs
- Biodiversity offsets and pest control issues in Batlow.

Week 1| Tumbarumba

Session 1: Thursday 7 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

Session 2: Thursday 7 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- Engagement with Forestry NSW
- Undergrounding and the Parliament of NSW (STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government)
- EIS process, EIS resources, level of detail presented, and scepticism on the impact of a submission
- Compensation as a near-neighbour, and negative sentiment towards previous landowner engagement
- Visual impact as a near-neighbour, and lack of regulatory mechanism for compensation
- Bushfire risk concerns
- Noise impacts and mitigation measures during construction.

Week 1| Adelong

Session 1: Friday 8 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

Key topics raised:

- Green Hills alignment
- Proposed access tracks
- Easement acquisition process.

Week 2| Gunning

Session 1: Monday 11 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- Visual amenity impacts to near-neighbours
- Queries surrounding the Parliament of NSW (STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government)
- EIS process, EIS resources, and level of detail presented
- Concept design and access tracks.

Week 2| Yass

Session 1: Tuesday 12 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

CCG Session: Tuesday 12 September 2023, 3pm – 4pm

Session 2: Tuesday 12 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- The Parliament of NSW (STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government) and benefits of undergrounding
- Impacts of construction workers on local health services
- Strain on mental health of local impacted communities due to project developments
- EIS process and the submission process
- Visual amenity impacts
- LCVIA methodology and assessment outcomes
- Impacts to the platypus population
- Engagement process to date
- Decision making process on route alignment.

Week 2| Gundagai

Session 1: Wednesday 13 September, 11am – 1 pm

Key topics raised:

- Interest in understanding the construction methodology and transmission towers construction
- Access tracks and use of local roads during construction
- Support needed during landowner conversations in the property negotiation process
- Information on the EIS and specialist studies.

Week 2| Tarcutta

Session 1: Wednesday 13 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- LCVIA, the visual impact assessment methodology outcomes and photomontages
- Construction impacts, management and mitigation measures
- EIS process, how to make a submission and planning approvals timeframes.

Week 2| Taralga

Session 1: Thursday 14 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

Session 2: Thursday 14 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- Engagement strategy and approach with community, landowners and councils
- The Parliament of NSW (STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT) inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects (Chaired by the Government)
- Other Transgrid projects, including PEC and VNI West
- Compensation for visually impacted landowners
- Digital EIS, the target audience and current approach to the EIS
- Support with upcoming landowner engagement, especially during compulsory property acquisition.

Week 2| Crookwell

Session 1: Friday 15 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Key topics raised:

- EIS process and how to make a submission
- Use of mitigation measures during construction and operation
- Methodology for the biodiversity impact assessment

- Concerns around vegetation and tree removal
- Concerns surrounding contractors and contractor outsourcing.

Week 3| Yass

Session 1: Wednesday 27 September 2023, 4pm – 6pm

Week 3| Tumut

Session 1: Thursday 28 September 2023, 11am – 1pm

2. Online sessions overview

Webinars

Session 1: Thursday 7 September 2023, 1:30pm – 3pm

Session 2: Thursday 14 September 2023, 1:30pm – 3pm

Session 3: Wednesday 20 September 2023, 12pm – 1:30pm

Key topics raised:

- Land Use and Property, including cost of easements
- Aboriginal Heritage specialist study
- HumeLink project footprint dimensions and construction impacts
- Workforce training in firefighting activities
- Methodology and industry approach in relation to economic impacts
- Estimated number of temporary workers in short-term accommodation
- General easement enquiries, including easement maintenance to reduce bushfire risk
- Visual impact assessment guidelines and photomontage ratings
- Construction timeframes, workforce flow based on the construction program and workforce accommodation, construction impacts, Construction Environmental Engagement Plan (CEMP), and engagement approach
- Concerns about potential impacts from EMF
- Biodiversity impact assessment.

3. Digital resources

3.1. Digital EIS

To support a better understanding of the HumeLink EIS, the project team developed a digital EIS (DEIS). The DEIS is a user friendly and interactive platform, presenting key outcomes of the EIS. This platform delivered interactive mapping, multimedia displays and links to the full EIS on the NSW DPE Major Projects Planning Portal.

Throughout the EIS public exhibition from 30 August 2023 to 10 October 2023, the DEIS received 18.27k views with 1.5k active users visiting the HumeLink Digital EIS portal and 20 users clicking through to the DPE NSW Major Projects Planning portal submissions page.

The most popular EIS topic viewed on the DEIS was Biodiversity, with a total of 208 unique users during the EIS public exhibition. Aboriginal heritage was the second most popular EIS topic, with 138 unique users and Landscape Character and Visual Amenity was the third most popular EIS topic with 116 unique users.