

Meeting Minutes

Victoria NSW Interconnector West

Meeting title:	VNI West Community Consultative Group Meeting	Date:	27 November 2024
Location:	Deniliquin RSL	Time:	10:00am – 1:00pm
Chairperson:	Brendan Blakeley		
Attendees:			
VNI West Project Team - Transgrid			
Colin Mayer	Project Director		
Geoff Hudson	Environment Manager		
Nathan Menser	Community and Stakeholder Lead		
Ben Doran	Land and Property Manager		
Reem Nasr	Secretary VNI West CCG		
VNI West Community Consultative Group			
Garry Stoll	Murrumbidgee Council		
Colin Bull	Landowner (alternate for Donald Bull)		
Bob Crawford	Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council		
Bruce Rollinson	Landholder		
Peter O'Shannassy	NSW Local Land Services - Murray		
David Crew	Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre		
Invited Guest Speakers			
Jarryd Barton	Environmental Planner, WSP		
Damian Williams	Project Manager, WSP		
Michelle Patrick	Ecologist, WSP		
Suzie Rawlinson	Visual Impact Specialist, WSP		
Beatrice Hobson	Engagement Specialist, WSP		
Apologies			
Trevor Clark	Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council		
Michael Chalmers	Ricegrowers' Association - Wakool Branch		
Sarah Ryan	Murray River Council		
Haydon Love	Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council		
Donald Bull	Landholder		
Mark Dalzell	Edward River Council		
Alison Glenn	NSW Farmers Association – Bunnaloo Branch		
Rose Dunn	Deniliquin Local Aboriginal Land Council		
John Kerr	Moama Local Aboriginal Land Council		
Mick Lalor	NSW NPWS		

Maisie Moore	Wamba Wamba Local Aboriginal Land Council
Shannon Sampson	Community member

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 from previous meeting.</p>
2. What are you hearing?	<p>Bruce Rollinson (BR): Described the impacts on roads close to the Dinawan Substation with the increased construction traffic from EnergyConnect. Indicated that roads upgraded in mid-2024 are already showing signs of impact. Noted how well maintained McLennons Bore Road is for EnergyConnect. Concern for significant roads in region (Pretty Pine Road and Carrathool Road) as potential traffic and transport routes.</p> <p>Encouraged community benefits work include a focus on roads, combined with telecommunications (for coverage) and emergency services (access) during fire.</p> <p>Geoff Hudson (GH) noted regular meetings in place with Transport for NSW (TfNSW), to discuss identification and categorisation of roads to be used and what will be required.</p> <p>Garry Stoll (GS): Noted Transgrid to be aware of potential for duplication of activity with developers.</p> <p>GS: Commented that State & Federal Governments need to be more active in the region and consider taking on management of some roads, as State / Local roads are feeders to/from access work sites.</p> <p>Colin Mayer (CM): Noted October meeting with regional Councils, Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) and Transgrid. Roads and transportation routes from ports to site was discussed. EnergyCo is planning to support Councils to manage planning assessments from within the Southwest Renewable Energy Zone (SWREZ), and also consider the wider effects of the REZ.</p> <p>BR: Sought a list of all the roads to be impacted.</p> <p>Bob Crawford (BC): There is a floodplain management group planning and assessing road use, which may lead to some financial contribution to the region.</p> <p>Damian Williams (DW): advised of meeting with TfNSW last week, seeking input on the operational and traffic assessment. The assessment is currently considering 42 intersections on the State and Regional road network, including vehicle size and volume. The next step is to engage with Councils on traffic volumes and touch points (access to water, waste).</p> <p>Chair: Recommended further discussion to draw out specific issues on secondary roads that are proposed to be used for access. While we can look at impact on roads nominated in the Traffic & Transport study in the EIS, we</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>may also need to consider some of the tributary roads servicing the access roads.</p> <p>Colin Bull (CB): Encouraged to have road treatments in place prior to works occurring. Noted to speak with Yanco Delta windfarm regarding its approval, and consideration of Carrathool Road at Four Corners.</p> <p>CM: Transgrid understands EnergyCo is intending to make representations regarding State / Local roads.</p> <p>ACTION: Follow up EnergyCo on outcomes of Southwest REZ (SWREZ) regarding coordination on roads.</p> <p>David Crew (DC): Advised of meeting with EnergyCo 26 November 2024 regarding opportunities for upskilling and reskilling in the region.</p> <p>Acknowledged Transgrid's letter of support for the Country Universities Centre in the region to support Echuca-Moama, Deniliquin, Hay, Finley, with an estimated \$500,000 in pledges from the broader community.</p> <p>Also noted renewable energy developers in conversation with Deniliquin High School on opportunities presented by renewable energy projects.</p> <p>Peter O'Shannassy (PO): Suggested for increased communication and coordination between Transgrid and renewable developers, as many proponents appear to be proposing work in the same corridors or crossing each other's infrastructure.</p> <p>CM: We recognise that renewable developers have proposals or plans, none currently have an approval to build in the SWREZ as EnergyCo has not yet finalised its SWREZ Access Scheme. This Access Scheme will determine which renewable developments have access to connect to the Transgrid network. These developers may have also signed preliminary deeds with Transgrid for proposed connections, but we are unable to provide further advice.</p> <p>At a recent landowner meeting with Transgrid and EnergyCo in Argoon, landowners noted a 'spaghetti approach' of local transmission lines proposed to connect into the grid. However, EnergyCo needs to approve its Access Scheme so that all can understand which developers have access.</p> <p>PO: Noted Yanco Delta Wind Farm has planning approval.</p> <p>GS: Council has advised it would not be supportive of Yanco Delta undertaking roadside vegetation clearing (approx. 90ha) to allow transmission connection line for the renewable development.</p> <p>Chair: Clarified that EnergyCo's Access Scheme will determine which renewable developments move forward at this first stage.</p> <p>BC: Tabled letter (attached) outlining concerns from the local community, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project financing • Materials specifications • Robustness of the CSSI process • Operational efficiency of the line. • Ensuring the route accounts for Indigenous sites, flooding and biodiversity.

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$10k access payment being not proportional to the potential number of towers being hosted. <p>CM: Regarding operational efficiency, Transgrid does not host a single transmission line that would operate at its full rating for 100% of the year. The Transgrid network currently relies on a spine that runs along the eastern seaboard and transmits power to meet the demands of end users.</p> <p>Regarding material specifications, Transgrid aims to provide a quality network; however, we are aware that issues do arise and could arise again. What we continually learn and improve is having processes in place that manage quality assurance of materials, including sample testing on materials. Similarly, we have processes in place to manage subcontractors' activities and undertake testing and spot checks on towers and lines, followed by an ongoing maintenance and monitoring regime.</p> <p>Regarding route selection, Transgrid has been transparent on its journey for VNI West in NSW, taking a broad (50km) study corridor through a route refinement process that has now delivered a 200m-wide transmission line corridor, which will be further narrowed to a final 70 metre easement (through the EIS and landowner easement negotiation process).</p> <p>GH: noted the Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI) is very well described by the NSW Government.</p> <p>ACTION: <i>Share CSSI guidelines with CCG.</i></p> <p>Close out action: Links:</p> <p><i>What do SSI and CSSI mean?</i></p> <p>Declaration of SSI and CSSI, State Significant infrastructure Guide, March 2021 (PDF 126KB)</p> <p><i>What are the guidelines for CSSI / SSI?</i></p> <p>Improving assessment guidance Planning [webpage]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scroll down to heading 'State Significant Infrastructure guidelines' for reference documents on SSI and preparing various reports that may be required for developing infrastructure projects. <p>DW: Guidelines for environmental assessments of projects are becoming savvier and more stringent. Projects are facing new guidelines being introduced in response to previous projects that outline a more rigorous assessment regime.</p> <p>Jarryd Barton (JB): Following the CSSI declaration, the project is issued the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), which set the minimum standard requirements from both State and Federal governments, which also indicates independent validations and checks of the reports.</p> <p>DW: We host routine discussions with government agencies as we develop the EIS. Before the EIS is accepted for public exhibition, there is an adequacy review that checks the project team has met the requirements under the SEARs and EIS. There is a high level of detail and rigour applied to these studies.</p> <p>BC: Transgrid's mapping is indicating some access tracks to be 10km or more.</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>JB: The principle for access tracks is to maximise use of existing tracks, farm tracks, etc wherever possible</p> <p>BC: suggested combining firebreaks with access tracks.</p> <p>Chair: Opportunities to capitalise on project infrastructure like access tracks is best done through early dialogue with the project team.</p> <p>Chair: Clarified, the EIS will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the transmission line corridor • access tracks • Campsites • Site compounds/Laydown areas • required buffer zones. <p>PO: Raised Biosecurity concern, regarding potential for overseas pests to arrive in packaging of materials. NSW Local Land Services is introducing surveillance and tracking mechanisms that monitor the packaging components of overseas delivery.</p> <p>Chair: Queried Transgrid on what can be done at point of entry, and hierarchy of what can be done in each location?</p> <p>GH: Transgrid committed to working with NSW LLS to set up a procedure.</p> <p>ACTION (on notice): <i>Engage with NSW LLS on biosecurity protocols for these proposed laydown/storage areas. Opportunity for presentation material at later date.</i></p> <p>CB: Raised fire mitigation as a huge issue and concern, particularly in the construction and operation phases. Suggested opportunities for community benefits to support fire mitigation outcomes (new equipment purchases).</p> <p>CM: For the construction phase, we develop fire mitigation plans with RFS and our contractor.</p> <p>JB: For the EIS development, we have a bushfire specialist considering potential impacts of construction and operation. Recommended mitigations then sit within the fire mitigation plans.</p> <p>Chair: Queried if there is a sample fire management plan?</p> <p>ACTION: <i>Share sample fire management plan with group</i></p> <p>Close out action: Link: Project EnergyConnect (NSW - Western Section) Emergency Plan (PDF 76.9MB)</p> <p>BR: Does Transgrid pay State Emergency Levies?</p> <p>ACTION: <i>Question accepted on notice.</i></p> <p><i>Post meeting response:</i> Yes, the NSW Emergency Services levy is paid by Transgrid when it incepts/renews property insurance policies for construction, and each year of operation for the operational policy.</p> <p>CB: Raised telecommunications black spots as a regional issue, with local implications. Indicated Mabins Well exchange is useless, and locals cannot make calls to report if there is a power outage.</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Chair: Telecommunications and connectivity is being looked at from both a short term construction and long term legacy perspective.</p> <p>JB: Noted the EIS provides opportunity to make a submission on this issue, and for the project to formally respond publicly.</p> <p>BC: Will safety (red) lights be installed on the towers?</p> <p>CM: Safety lighting is only installed on the request of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), and would be within a certain distance of registered aerodromes</p> <p>Nathan Menser (NM): Tabled two key issues raised by Alison Glenn, following conversation at Moulamein Information Session on 26/11/24:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgrid is encouraged to continue its engagement with directly affected landowners along the 200m transmission line corridor, to find solutions with landowners who may have issues with the proposed solution. • Raised concern on access to water and groundwater, seeking clarity on water access points for the project. Indicated the cumulative effect of VNI West and other renewable developers all seeking access to the same water resources in the region, and how it may impact on local communities and agriculture operations. <p>GH: Noted the project will be developing an overall Water Supply Strategy. At present, this will include access to water through purchasing water via the current water broker scheme. Most of the water used at the workforce accommodation camps will use recycled water.</p>
<p>3. Project Director's update</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 2024: Confirmed 200m transmission line corridor including the border crossing location with Victoria. Continuing discussions with directly affected landowners on access requirements. • Attended EnergyCo / Regional Councils meeting in Hay in October to provide combined view of transmission and renewable energy zone. • Working to develop 'go to market' plan for project delivery. We have received expression of interest (EOIs) from 24 companies. In 2025, we will assess these EOIs and determine which will be invited to tender. <p>DC: Called on Transgrid to introduce more rigour into its Indigenous engagement targets and encouraged early engagement to prepare and build future capacity.</p> <p>CM: Transgrid is looking to build that capacity for future work now. We're currently working with some Indigenous suppliers through a tender process that would include these suppliers on our approved suppliers list.</p> <p>DC: Welcomed this feedback, suggesting it is a great opportunity to do some transformational work.</p> <p>CM: Noted some of Transgrid's requirements can be onerous for the smaller companies and present challenges (such as safety and compliance standards)</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>NM: Recap on 200m transmission line corridor and advised on Joint Meeting with Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) held in Murrabit in October 2024 where corridor was first announced.</p> <p>Ben Doran (BD): Outlined current progress on landowner engagement and property valuation process. Advised that directly affected landowners would receive Letter of Offer (to commence easement negotiation process) early in 2025. Encouraged landowners to seek own property valuation for the easement.</p> <p>Also in early 2025, the team will commence discussion with landowners on the Property Management Plan process.</p> <p>A key change for landowners hosting transmission lines is that the clearance height for machinery moving underneath the lines is revised and is now at 5 metres (up from 4.3 metres).</p> <p>BC: Acknowledged the two sources of compensation: Just Terms and Strategic Benefits Payment. Suggested that landowners may want to trade-off between the two parts of compensation for property valuation, particularly for succession planning.</p> <p>BD: Advised Strategic Benefit Payment cannot be changed, as this is a mandated rate set by NSW Government. The Just Terms component of the compensation is done under negotiation between Transgrid and the landowner. The valuers who conduct the valuation follow criteria that is applied on the valuation. Landowners are encouraged to seek advice from a land valuer who has experience in the Just Terms Act, and to engage early with Transgrid.</p> <p>NM: Noted the Community Investments and Benefits process to identify projects and initiatives has been extended. The project team will continue to engage on broad ideas for projects and initiatives through Q1, 2025, with a view to identifying specific initiatives through Q2/Q3, 2025, for submission in Q4, 2025. With this extended time, the community survey has been extended through to mid-December. We will engage with local communities in February 2025 to seek further advisory on these initiatives.</p> <p>Reem Nasr (RN): We are looking to recruit two new members, as discussed at previous meeting. We have held off until completion of Council elections and will commence in February 2025. Same as before, we will conduct a promotion for nominations and assessment, but also seek advice from CCG Members on direct nominations and recommendations.</p>
4. EIS Overview	<p>NM: Provided an overview of planned engagement for EIS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Input to technical studies: November 2024 & February 2025 (b) Public Exhibition of EIS: mid-2025 <p>JB: Recap on Planning and approvals process (Slide 17)</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Action: Share Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs)</p> <p>Close out action: Link: Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (PDF 256Kb)</p> <p>JB: Shared overview of planning approval pathway, noting project assessment area will include access tracks, potential camp sites, laydown areas.</p> <p>DC: Asked if the EIS will look for things that should be there but aren't present?</p> <p>JB: Desktop searches are undertaken to validate and differentiate what has potential to occur and what's known to occur.</p> <p>JB: Outlined the impact topics requested by the SEARs. Noted today's meeting would focus on Biodiversity, Visual Impact, Social impact and Indigenous Heritage.</p> <p>Biodiversity</p> <p>Michelle Patrick (MP): outlined the purpose and scope of the biodiversity assessment, its methodology and the listed threatened ecological communities. Noted surveys to date, including identification of threatened flora and fauna recorded.</p> <p>BR: Noted that Superb Parrots are not noted on the list. Were these observed? Advised of some sightings (from flocks of 4 to 40, depending on date/time) along McLennons Bore Road.</p> <p>PO: Noted Yanco Creek is a potential corridor for their movement.</p> <p>BR: Added the Superb Parrots feed off Weeping Myalls blossom. Asked about mitigation (planting and regeneration work) in this corridor.</p> <p>Chair: Opportunities for local regeneration to keep the species here along the corridor to support the fauna</p> <p>DC: Advised there are reports that may not be publicly available about biodiversity, also linking into the local Landcare groups. Really keen to see food, fibre, medicine plants and human use included in the assessment as well.</p> <p>PO: Noted many Travelling Stock Routes (TSRs) have been assessed and those reports cover some of the same areas.</p> <p>Chair: How we can we access that information?</p> <p>ACTION: <i>contact David Crew and Peter O'Shannassy to follow up on sharing biodiversity information.</i></p> <p>MP: Encouraged members to please share any reports, baseline data etc that can be considered as part of the EIS assessment.</p> <p>DW: Acknowledged the project footprint is generally broader than the 200m corridor, as the footprint also includes substation sites and ancillary areas.</p> <p>ACTION: <i>Provide update to the glossary that outlines the terminology on the definition of '200m corridor', 'project assessment area' etc.</i></p> <p>Closed out: attached to Minutes</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Visual Impact Assessment</p> <p>Suzie Rawlinson (SR) introduced Visual Impact Assessment and the intention to provide certainty to communities about what is assessed. New Visual Impact guidelines were released by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure (DPHI) two weeks ago. This guideline will be used for VNI West's assessment.</p> <p>ACTION: <i>Link to new Visual Impact Assessment guidelines</i></p> <p>Close out Action: Link: Transmission Guideline: Technical Supplement for Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment, November 2024</p> <p>Chair: Previously, this group nominated a few points that are important to the community. Are we able to get those on the table for consideration?</p> <p>SR: The guidelines are quite prescriptive around which views are required; however, we also need to assess landscape character. The assessment area for visual impact is 1.5km either side of the 200m construction corridor, where landscape character is assessed on 5km either side of the 200m construction corridor. The intention of the guidelines is to create consistency.</p> <p>Social Impact Assessment</p> <p>DW: Outlined the purpose of the Social Impact Assessment, the assessment study area and methodology. Also described the various engagement activities (including interviews and surveys). Preliminary assessment outcomes were noted. (slide 38)</p> <p>DC: Indicated the list appears based on deficits. Are prospective benefits included? Noted that Yarkuwa has not been engaged to participate in SIA process.</p> <p>Action: <i>Facilitate introduction between DC and WSP SIA Specialist.</i></p> <p>CB: Regarding biodiversity impact: if my woodland is cleared, and you seek an offset somewhere else, how is that fair on a landowner?</p> <p>Chair: It's the principle of direct compensation. Other opportunities may be present for regeneration and what's occurred on property.</p> <p>GH: We are required to comply with the offset process which is to first avoid an impact. If an Impact is present, then we look to mitigate. If we can't mitigate, then we look to offset. At each of those stages we need to show our due diligence and ensure that the offset is 'like for like'.</p> <p>BR: From a broader community perspective, roads are used equally by directly affected landowners and communities.</p> <p>DW: The SIA considers views of both local landowners and the broader community</p> <p>Aboriginal Heritage</p> <p>DW outlined methodology and preliminary assessment outcomes and next steps through to EIS Exhibition. (Slide 43)</p> <p>DC: Indicated geomorphology is a critical aspect of Aboriginal Heritage studies.</p> <p>PO: Asked if Aboriginal heritage inspections focused on corridor, or if inspections are expanded to cover road infrastructure, access tracks etc.</p> <p>JB: Advised the whole project footprint will be walked over.</p>

Agenda item	Summary notes
	<p>Open discussion – biodiversity matters</p> <p>Members sought further information on biodiversity offsets and stewardship agreements.</p> <p>MP: Advised stewardship agreements can be considered on property, but there is a process to establish and will contain some restrictions</p> <p>Chair: Action: <i>link to stewardship agreements</i></p> <p>Close out action: Link: Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements</p> <p>BR: Asked about how many trees may be removed from the 200m corridor and encouraged replanting in the same locality as where trees are removed.</p> <p>JB: The Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) will advise on the impact within the 200m corridor and opportunities to replant.</p> <p>GH: The BDAR will also have a requirement to monitor growth and regrowth post construction.</p> <p>BR: Speculated the clearance could be quite substantial in some regions.</p> <p>CB: Suggested Transgrid to speak with LLS Murray Seed Services to work on a 'like for like' replacement on tree planting.</p> <p>PO: Advised that before any clearing commences, we're hoping to collect seeds from species along the line.</p> <p>Chair: The more localised the response is the better the outcome will be.</p>
5. Wrap up and close	<p>Sought sense check on day of the week for meeting, whether Wednesday or Thursday would suit. Members present were agreeable to continue Wednesday meetings, would welcome Thursdays, but advised to avoid Tuesdays (due to local Council meetings generally being held on Tuesdays).</p> <p><i>Post meeting update:</i> The next CCG Meeting is proposed for Thursday 13 February 2025.</p>

Action items

Agenda item	Description	Person responsible	Status
2. What are you hearing	ACTION: Follow up EnergyCo on outcomes of Southwest REZ coordination on roads.	Secretary	In progress
	ACTION: Share CSSI guidelines	Secretary	Completed
	ACTION: Engage with NSW LLS on biosecurity protocols for proposed laydown/storage areas	Geoff Hudson	Noted for action
	ACTION: Share sample fire management plan with the group	Secretary	Completed
	Question on Notice: Does Transgrid pay State Emergency Levies?	Secretary	Completed
4.EIS update	ACTION: Share Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements	Secretary	Completed

Agenda item	Description	Person responsible	Status
	ACTION: Contact David Crew and Peter O'Shannassy to follow up on sharing biodiversity info	Secretary	Completed
	ACTION: Update glossary with EIS terms	Secretary	Attached, In progress
	ACTION: Share new Visual Impact Assessment Guidelines	Secretary	Completed
	ACTION: Connect David Crew with WSP SIA team for Social Impact Assessment	NM > WSP	Completed
	ACTION: Share information about Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements	Secretary	Completed

Resources

Item	Link
Preferred Route Report	VNI West Preferred Route Report - March 2024 (Transgrid website) (PDF 4.7MB)
Draft Route Report	VNI West Draft Route Report - January 2024 (Transgrid website) (PDF 23.3MB)
Preferred Corridor Report	VNI West Preferred Corridor Report - October 2023 (Transgrid website) (PDF 3.66 MB)
Draft Corridor Report	VNI West Draft Corridor Report - June 2023 (Transgrid website) (PDF 39.34 MB)
Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission Documents	Transgrid VNI West project webpage - RIT-T information
State Significant Infrastructure (SSI), including Critical State Significant Infrastructure	NSW Department of Planning Housing & Infrastructure - SSI information [webpage: scroll down to heading 'State Significant Infrastructure']
Guidance note on SSI and CSSI	Declaration of SSI and CSSI, State Significant infrastructure Guide, March 2021
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
Letter tabled by Bob Crawford	PDF
Email to CCG by Bob Crawford	PDF

Next meeting

Date:	Thursday, 13 February 2025	Time:	10:00am – 1:00pm
Location:	Moulamein	Chairperson:	Brendan Blakeley