

**MINUTES
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –
MEETING #21 – 29 May 2024**

Meeting date: 29 May 2024
Meeting time: 5.30pm start, The North Star Hotel
Meeting called by: Catherine Botta

CCG Meeting Purpose: The CCG is a consultative forum and not a decision-making forum.

Attendees

Catherine Botta	Independent Chair
Janine Buesnel	Secretariat – Premier Strategy
Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Archie Conroy	Community member – Ballarat/Ballan/CCG Central
Ian Terrill (online)	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central/Chair Moorabool Central Highlands Power Alliance
Peter Dreimanis	Strategic Planning – City of Ballarat
Malcolm Tinkler	General Manager – AusNet Services
Megan Cusack	Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement – AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Carolyn Balint	Approvals Manager – AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Stakeholder Engagement– AusNet Services
Hayden Burge	Independent technical specialist - Landform Architects

Apologies

Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Matthew Milbourne	Melton City Council
Rachel Blackwell	Pyrenees Shire Council

Not attended

Bronwyn Southee	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Catherine McLay	Moorabool City Council
Jennifer Thomas	Northern Grampians Shire
Karl Sass	Melton City Council
Simon Toll	Community member – Waubra/CCG West

Agenda item 1	Apologies, minutes and actions of previous meeting
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- Independent Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged Country, welcomed presenters for the evening and new member Archie Conroy. Megan Cusack, AusNet’s newly appointed Director of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, was also acknowledged as joining a CCG meeting for the first time and Janine Buesnel would be doing minutes in Dina’s absence.

- Chair spoke to code of conduct and format of meeting given some new members are present.
- Last meeting was April 16. Informal online meeting to confirm dates and topics for upcoming CCG meetings, also confirmed incoming and outgoing correspondence received by the Chair.
- Meeting planned for May 1 was cancelled due to personal matters for one AusNet team member who was considered a critical attendee.
- No comments nor changes to the January meeting minutes had been received, the minutes have been accepted.
- Actions from the previous meeting were discussed and resolved as follows:

Actions	Status
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain open , an opportunity to discuss questions with presenter will occur at a future meeting. CCG members will be asked to send questions prior to meeting.
Further questions regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and/or Community Benefit Fund (CBF) to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain open , an opportunity to discuss questions with presenter will occur at a future meeting. CCG members will be asked to send questions prior to meeting.
AusNet to present on CBF at future CCG.	AusNet to arrange for presentation at future meeting as agreed by CCG members
CCG members to inform Dina of their top 5 specialists they want to hear from.	Complete
Consider new CCG members from within network.	Complete – two (2) new members have joined the CCG
Submit list of community concerns to AusNet.	CCG community members

Agenda item 2	WRL update
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- It has been three months since the last meeting and the AusNet team has progressed the development of the proposed route, including releasing the updated alignment north of Waubra last week.
- AusNet showed the map (that is included in updated fact sheet and available on project website) that shows previous proposed alignment and latest proposed alignment for discussion
- Work at the Bulgana end of the project area continues and will be part of a proposed update in mid-year (July/August). Reminder that the alignment remains a proposed alignment, through the planning process the Minister will determine a final alignment.

- Discussed the alignment was proposed now as 500kV from Bulgana to Sydenham, an update that was made to project scope in 2023.
- CCG members expressed concern this is a major change from original proposal and potentially some missed opportunity in the reconfiguration of alignment.
- CCG members asked for general feedback/sentiment from impacted landholders.
 - AusNet discussed there has been ongoing consultation, for almost one year, with landholders in Waubra, people who previously weren't in the alignment and now are and people who were and now are not.
 - Landholders along entire route (excluding approximately two) have an offer for easement.
 - In response to CCG member question "were they consulted or were they 'told'?" AusNet advised new route in area north of Waubra was designed in conjunction with landholders, who determined new alignment. There were concerns about volcanic cones which have Aboriginal cultural significance, plus discussions re views from homes around. Hayden Burge and AusNet route designer had been on the ground with farmers and landholders in Waubra to determine latest proposed alignment.
- Consultation involved AusNet land team informing landholders who were under original alignment that they are no longer directly impacted and have also been consulting with landholders now impacted by the new alignment. Generally, feedback has been they accept the change but are not expressing support for the project.
- Next step in process was for AusNet to contact neighbouring landholders. The offer of visual impact assessments with Hayden Burge is available to neighbours.
- AusNet do not make public announcements until there have been discussions with the impacted landholders. In some cases where landholders decline to meet with AusNet this is not possible.
- CCG members sought confirmation that there had been an attempt to reach each of the impacted landholders along the entire alignment. AusNet confirmed that 98% of offer for easements had been presented, with a couple declining to meet/discuss.
- CCG members believe they should have been brought in at the initial point in time rather than prior to public release of the re-alignment. CCG disappointed that they weren't informed earlier.
- CCG requested further discussion at the next meeting to ensure they will be informed of changes within the project, appropriately.

Agenda item 3	EES overview and fact sheet process
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- When the EES is on public exhibition the volume of information will be considerable and potentially technical and cumbersome. AusNet is focussed on producing materials that are user friendly and digestible.
- As part of the EES, the individual technical assessment reports will be based on study methods and findings in each area, with some ranging from 150 –1000 pages. Chapters will be around 40 -

100 pages. The intention is that chapters are written in simple language, not as technical as the reports. Impact assessment fact sheets will be 4 – 5 pages, allowing reader to get a general overview of topic and ‘deep dive’ back through chapters and technical reports for more information on a key topic. They will be released just prior to EES public exhibition.

- AusNet spoke to content of the EES, outlining technical reports currently being prepared including bushfire through to biodiversity, landscape and visual, etc.
- Environmental Management Framework considered the most important component of the EES main report. This will outline what AusNet’s response will be in making sure they are managing potential impacts. It will include an overview of AusNet’s operational environmental management plan, construction management plans, operating procedures and approaches, as well as Electrical Safety Victoria’s approach, and how they feed in together.
- Community will be given 40 business days to review. AusNet notes this isn’t a lot of time to get through the detail which is part of the reason why they will come out with some preliminary fact sheets to help provide information that is easily read and digestible.
- AusNet will seek feedback from CCG members on fact sheets and input into key community materials. Drafts of two (2) fact sheets were provided at the meeting. AusNet reiterated that the materials are only early drafts and to be kept confidential until published to community later in the year. AusNet would like to know:

- Too technical/ not technical enough?
- Long enough /short enough?
- More/less information?
- Clarity and flow – does it make sense?
- Look, feel, style, tone?
- User friendly? Yes? No?
- How would the CCG like to provide the feedback? As a group or individually? Through our next meeting?
- Timeframe of providing the feedback.

- CCG members agreed they would review the materials and provide feedback. AusNet to provide template to allow all members to contribute individual thoughts showing visibility of all members comments, possibly a reply all so members know all comments raised.

Agenda item 4	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A – Landscape and Visual (Hayden Burge)
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- Hayden has previously presented to the CCG so his presentation at this meeting was to be an update for the CCG members. Focus has been on the potential effects on significant landscape values and forms. The approach has been to assess potential impacts firstly with host landholders, then nearby and neighbouring landholders to the project. Then communities around those.

- Key features considered – the Bulgana Terminal Station and the 500kV double circuit towers (up to 80m high). 450 to 550m spacings centre to centre.
- Methodology - quantitative aspects, things that can be measured like distance, number of people, prominence, visibility. As well as qualitative aspects such as how and where is the project visible from and what is the qualitative impact on the landscape.
- The visual study area is 9.2km from the easement and the assessment has considered dwellings within 2kms of the easement.
- Key considerations when assessing landscape and visual amenity are visibility, distance, duration of the view and viewer numbers.
- Visual impact assessment then rated from nil through to high.
- Perceptually accurate images are preferred to inform visual impact.
- Scale of imagery in report has increased to A3 (from A4) since Hayden last presented to the CCG back in May 2022. Increased ability to discern/understand what is being said in words through the picture.
- Cumulative considerations include existing and proposed transmission lines, terminal stations and wind and solar farms.
- 16 townships reviewed along length of project. Larger townships have a number of viewpoints. Last time Hayden presented to CCG he had visited 10 properties, that has increased to 40+ since then.
- CCG members asked why monopoles hadn't been considered, it was explained steel monopoles for 500kV have not been technically proven in Australia, construction limitations and constraints. No 500kV monopoles in Australia. Biggest is 220kV across Westgate. Flagged as potentially requiring less maintenance. AusNet spoke to the objectives from AEMO re what the project needs to achieve and geographical separation to avoid impact to network should a storm event impact the network.
- Hayden reiterated that wherever access is granted they are able to get a far better outcome for the landholder and/or their neighbour.
- Continual feedback is 'why here?' Hayden reiterated we need to understand uniqueness of each area. Impact assessment focus is on is 'this' area different to the other area/s?
- CCG asked: Why is there no viewpoint for Hepburn Lagoon? Hayden stated he couldn't safely get in there. View from the north Daylesford-Clunes Road looking south has been included. CCG member felt it was a visual sensitive area and should be assessed.
- Hayden clarified that towers would carry four (4) bundles on each string, three (3) strings on each side. Same as Portland to Moorabool transmission line.
- CCG members flagged the following areas to be considered as viewpoints to reviewed for visual impact:
 - Ballan-Daylesford Road
 - Mt Stiglitz

- Ballan-Blackwood
 - Myrniong Greendale
 - Ballan-Blackwood
 - Bacchus Marsh – Gisborne
 - Bacchus Marsh – Toolern Vale
- CCG member asked how landscape impact can change, in reference to post the Beaufort/Grampian fires earlier this year. This question can be further discussed at upcoming CCG in bushfire technical presentation.
 - Asked if drone footage would work at Hepburn Lagoon - Hayden confirmed that he does not consider use of a drone where he can't get access (eg Hepburn lagoon). A large part of the assessment is understanding the context and the setting and how you move around the space rather than flying a drone over top. Useful for an overview but doesn't ground you and more importantly most people don't view the landscape from 15-20m above it.
 - CCG asked: How best are you dealing with the linear character and repetition of the project? In the area where it is more noticeable is section through Fenton's Road and Deep Read Creek, plains and cones. You can see it for kilometres. With increasing distance, the prominence diminishes considerably. Project Energy Connect was raised as a site to view. AusNet have already done a site visit. Recommendation to mitigate 'shine' of towers is to pre-dull ('pickle') the galvanised structures. Learning from observing projects in the field and visiting other sites.
 - Undergrounding to be discussed at a future meeting. Currently not considered a viable part of the project that Hayden has been asked to consider. Fact sheet on undergrounding is available on resource website which was released November 2021 – [LINK here](#)
 - Visual impact is still a key consideration on an underground project. Hayden spoke to the Marinus Link project.
 - CCG raised Lake Merrimu, and how will wires go across the lake and forest area? What can be done to direct views away from project in the area? Screening being considered to temper the impacts.

Agenda item 5	Community perceptions
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- CCG members requested more communication in relation to major announcements. AusNet reaffirmed timeline process. First and foremost, landholders are informed.
- CCG members reiterated community concerns. The CCG members and community are tired of continually raising issues, repeating questions, concerns and not getting answers. Four (4) years later saying it's exhausting, fatiguing. Asked what is AusNet doing about the following problems/issues?:
 - Devaluation
 - Land value
 - Tax issues

- Bank securities
 - Insurance
 - Fire safety
 - Mental health
 - Relationship breakdown
 - Community divide
 - How do we make sure our communities can survive this?
 - Stakeholder engagement
- AusNet do provide access to support networks for individual landowners who are impacted by the project.
 - Chair acknowledged it's been a long road for all involved and the issues aren't going away acknowledged it feels like they are compounding. Thanked all for continuing to come to the table and repeating concerns/issues. Let's acknowledge it's been tough and it's continuing to be tough. We will look at how we can include some discussion on these issues at the next meeting.

Agenda item 5	Next meeting date, topic
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- To be held on July 17 at Oscar's Hotel, Ballarat. Technical presentation - bushfire
- Meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Actions	Who
AusNet to present on CBF at future CCG.	AusNet
Consider new CCG members from within network.	CCG community members
Submit list of any additional community concerns to AusNet.	CCG community members