

**MINUTES
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –
MEETING #22 – 17 July 2024**

Meeting date: 17 July 2024
Meeting time: 5.30pm, Oscar’s 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
Archie Conroy	Community member – Ballan/CCG Central
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central (Chair, Moorabool Central Power Alliance)
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Peter Dreimanis	Strategic Planning – City of Ballarat
Malcolm Tinkler	General Manager – AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Carolyn Balint	Approvals Manager – AusNet Services
Megan Cusack	Communications and Stakeholder Engagement – AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Outrage Management Specialist, Strategic Engagement – AusNet Services
Craig Clifton	Independent technical specialist - Jacobs
Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

Apologies

Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Simon Toll	Community member – CCG Central

Not attended

Bronwyn Southee	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Catherine McLay	Moorabool Shire Council
Jennifer Thomas	Northern Grampians Shire
Karl Sass	Melton City Council

Agenda item 1	Apologies, minutes and actions of previous meeting
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- Independent Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged country, welcomed presenter for the evening.
- No comments nor changes to the 29 May 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 final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
Further questions regarding the CSR and/or CBF to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain open , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
AusNet to present on CBF at future CCG.	AusNet
CCG members to inform Dina of their top 5 specialists they want to hear from.	Closed - CCG community members
Consider new CCG members from within network.	To remain open, CCG community members
Submit list of community concerns to AusNet.	To remain open, CCG community members

Agenda item 2	WRL update
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- Work on the EES documentation continued over May/June.
- Easement offers and compensation negotiations progressing with landholders.
- AusNet is onboarding Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractors.
- VicGrid is consulting on its Community Benefit Fund framework for adjacent landholders.
- EES exhibition expected for March/April 2025.
- CCG members sought data on how many private landholders have entered an access agreement with Ausnet. **Action:** AusNet to confirm.
- Discussion about land access agreements vs registering for financial legal advice support. AusNet clarified that these were two different agreements and not dependent on one another. Legal advice support is capped at \$10,000, but can be exceeded depending on individual circumstances. **Action:** AusNet to clarify the difference and access for all landholders.
- Community members questioned whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF. **Action:** AusNet to clarify.
- Discussion about open actions and questions, AusNet will review and suggest how to address at the next meeting. **Action:** AusNet to review open questions and suggest approach.
- AusNet is reaching out to all neighbouring landholders within 2km of project area and building a database with contact details. Adjacent landholders will have the option to register for project updates. Approximately 120-130 responses have so far been received. There is also a dedicated webpage on the project website.

- Community members were interested in the criteria for neighbouring landholders, i.e what distance from the project. AusNet is contacting landholders up to 2km and possibly beyond. VicGrid's CBF criteria and framework is to be released in October and AusNet is working through potential options at the moment in order to address the potential criteria.
- Discussion around the difference of a CBF and Neighbourhood Compensation Plans. AusNet to clarify and possibly invite VicGrid to discuss the consultation outcome. **Action:** AusNet to clarify with VicGrid difference and invite to a future meeting.
- AusNet is planning a series of community information sessions to provide an update on the area near Bulgana and webinars in August/September.
- AusNet will again attend the Elmore Field Days with an information stall.
- Monthly advisory groups meetings with all councils are continuing to address impacts on council assets, i.e. roads etc.
- Community members raised the possibility of neighbouring landholders not being able to access insurance, or at higher premiums due to proximity to the transmission line (similar to homes in flood zones).
- Community members requested an update on how many Options for Easements have been entered into. These discussions are ongoing, but currently approximately 40% of host landholders are in negotiation with AusNet.

Agenda item 3	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A: Bushfire
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- See attached presentation for more details.
- The assessment has considered both the impact of the project to bushfire risk as well as the impacts of bushfires on the project.
- Discussion about a laydown area; secured area to lay down tools, equipment and materials, have vehicle washdown bays, refuelling, biosecurity etc. during construction. The area will be reinstated to the original condition after construction. AusNet is currently working through the exact locations for these areas in consultation with the councils and contractors. Community members raised concerns that the use of laydown areas has not been previously mentioned. Concern that information is released in a piecemeal approach.
- Community members strongly believe that the project will add an additional bushfire risk element into the area which is already fire prone. This applies both to the risk of the project igniting fires and the impact the project will have on firefighting.
- Community members questioned the use of a house loss risk map rather than a land loss risk map, as the agricultural land is of high value. The currentness of the data was questioned.

- It was also questioned why the fire history only went back to 1980, as there have been many large bushfires in the decades before that. The technical consultant stated this was primarily due to the unreliability of fire mapping data pre1980.
- Discussion about the impact the project has on firefighting activities. Community members seek clarification on messaging from CFA vs local units on how fires can be fought near towers.
Action: AusNet to clarify messaging around firefighting with CFA.
- Community members challenged the bushfire simulation model. Suggest Technical consultant should consider using actual data of previous fires for the EES. Discussion of where the data for the model comes from and how accurate it is. Technical consultant stated that the phoenix model is the same model that is used by DEECA, CFA and FFMV. CFA use fire modelling to plan resources and potential for loss of housing. Community members express scepticism about use of modelling to predict fire behaviour.
- Discussion on how/whether firefighters can use water bodies, especially the Merrimu Reservoir and the Pykes Creek Reservoir. Community members concerned the towers would hinder access to water for aerial firefighting.
- Community members questioned whether AusNet consider cumulative impacts of the project. As part of the EES, AusNet considers the cumulative impacts of the project, and also the impact of other proposed projects in the vicinity. There are ongoing discussions with other project proponents.
- Discussion of fire egress routes and the impact towers could have on these, especially where communities only have one egress. Community members believe the project should consider underground for these areas.
- Community members raised their concerns that the legislative Electricity Safety Act requirements are not a suitable mitigation against bushfires, as these documents are not always adhered to and don't prevent a fire.
- Community members raised concerns about the transparency of AusNet and feel as though AusNet were playing down fire risks.

Agenda item 4	Community perceptions
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- Correspondence was received by the chair from one of the community members not able to attend the meeting. The chair read out the email raising concerns about the entire RIT-T and EES process and that they feel that AusNet is not responding to community concerns.

Agenda item 5	Next meeting date, topic
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- Discussion about the low turnout of community members and observers. The forward dates will be recirculated to check if the dates still suit the majority of group members.

- Meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Actions	Who
CCG members sought data on how many private landholders have entered an access agreement with Ausnet.	AusNet to confirm
Discussion about land access agreements vs registering for financial legal advice support.	AusNet to clarify the difference and process to access for all landholders
Discussion whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF framework.	AusNet to clarify whether WRL is covered.
AusNet to review open questions from previous meetings and suggest approach to address these at next meeting.	AusNet
AusNet to clarify with VicGrid difference between CBF and Neighbourhood Compensation Plans.	AusNet
AusNet to invite VicGrid to a future meeting re CBF.	AusNet
AusNet to clarify messaging about firefighting around towers with CFA.	AusNet