

**MINUTES  
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –  
MEETING #23 – 21 August 2024**

**Meeting date:** 21 August 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 (online)
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central (Chair, Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance) (online)
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Carolyn Balint	Approvals Manager – AusNet Services (online)
Megan Cusack	Communications and Stakeholder Engagement – AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Risk Communication Specialist, Strategic Engagement – AusNet Services (online)
Shane Annett	Independent technical specialist - RMCG
Daryl Poole	Independent technical specialist - RMCG
Dina Jones	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

**Apologies**

Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Peter Dreimanis	Strategic Planning – City of Ballarat
Bronwyn Southee	Strategic Advisor – Hepburn Shire Council
Catherine McLay	Moorabool Shire Council

**Not attended**

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 and mentioned the apologies.
- A few comments to the July meeting minutes had been received, however these have been resolved as follows:
  - It was requested that the community member's letter that was read out by the chair at the last meeting was to be tabled with the minutes. However the letter was received by

all CCG members per email and read out at the meeting, so the community members present didn't require the letter to be tabled. The minutes have been accepted.

- Actions from the previous meeting were discussed and resolved as follows:

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Status</b>
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
Further questions regarding the Corporate Social Responsibility and/or Community Benefits Fund to be sent to secretariat prior to a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
CCG members sought data how many private landholders have entered an access agreement with Ausnet.	AusNet to confirm exact numbers. <b>CLOSED</b> , information provided as part of the project update, see below.
Discussion about land access agreements vs registering for financial legal advice support.	AusNet to clarify the difference and process to access for all landholders. <b>OPEN</b>
Discussion whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF framework.	AusNet to clarify whether WRL is covered. <b>OPEN</b>
AusNet to review open questions and suggest approach to address these at next meeting.	AusNet. <b>CLOSED</b> , AusNet suggests an out of session meeting to discuss these outstanding issues.

Agenda item 2	WRL update
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- AusNet to release updates on terminal station location at Bulgana and the proposed route near the Hepburn Lagoon.
- TRG is looking at the visual impact, biodiversity and agriculture/forestry reports at next meeting.
- AusNet updated on some leadership changes, with Malcolm Tinkler departing. Georgie Foster is acting General Manager until a replacement is announced, expected within the next weeks.
- AusNet is considering an out of session meeting to address the outstanding items, possibly a half-day session in October.
- Following the presentation of the bushfire technical presentation at the previous CCG meeting, and identification of additional fire events, AusNet acknowledges that there have been instances where transmission lines have started or have contributed to fires. The language in the communications materials will be updated accordingly.
- The possible locations of laydown areas for construction will be included in the EES documentation and is currently subject to contractor negotiations. A factsheet for this is also in development.

- AusNet confirmed that 65% of properties that AusNet needs access to along the proposed route have been accessed by AusNet contractors as part of the EES. Questioned what will happen with the remaining 35%, AusNet stated that they will continue negotiations with those landowners. Discussion about the definition of “need of access” and location of the land parcels, ie towards the western end of the route or distributed evenly? Also, whether it was 65% of number of properties or 65% of the length of the route. AusNet clarified that ideally it would have access to every property along the route for its surveys as part of the EES and for development of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan. Where access has been denied, AusNet has used alternative methods to assess the land via photography, satellite images, use of existing data and reports as well as the presumption of presence of species. **ACTION:** AusNet to confirm the distribution of the 65% of land parcels along the route.
- Clarification around the location of laydown and temporary workers’ accommodation areas was sought. Initially AusNet stated that no temporary accommodation would be required, however given the tight market for housing and short-term rentals, this is being revisited.
- AusNet gave an overview of the proposed route update which included the location for the proposed new terminal station at Bulgana. It will be connected to the existing terminal station with an approximately 2km 200kV line.
- AusNet gave an overview of the planned communication and engagement activities for these updates. One community member suggested a town hall type session for all landholders. Concerns were raised that community members don’t have enough time and opportunity to raise issues. AusNet discussed that community members have several ways to reach the project team including via land officers, engagement team and engagement events and that a town hall event was not planned for future engagement.
- Discussion about what AusNet does with the feedback received through the CCG and engagement activities. AusNet confirmed that feedback is taken onboard and, in some cases, has influenced the technical reports. **ACTION:** AusNet to share summary of members feedback and what changes have been made to fact sheets.

Agenda item 3	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A: Agriculture and Forestry
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- See attached presentation for more details.
- The case studies raised in the presentation are based on actual farms. Some community members felt that the actual circumstances and the complexity of farming was not being adequately captured. Concerns were raised about the range of crops mentioned, some were not considered relevant eg Garlic and others should have been included eg Canola and Pyrethrum.
- A breakdown of the figures re: cropping, horticulture and grazing was sought, this is approximately a third each. However, the report could overstate the number of land parcels used for

horticultural and cropping, as historical data was used to assess the land use. Where no information was available, the technical specialists took the approach to assume the highest value land use for the area. Some community members expressed concern about the currency and accuracy of the data sets used for the analysis and the need for extensive ground truthing, particularly as farming is seasonally based.

- It was questioned whether the specialists consider the impact to the entire crop industry sector, i.e. potatoes, canola and other crops, rather than just the impact to the landholder. The assessment considers the impact on a local, regional and state level, but not on a national level, as the percentage of impact would be much lower, if not negligible. Cumulative impacts are considered by AusNet as part of the EES. Some community members expressed concerns about the potential impact on gaining or losing certification for international markets eg Canola.
- The level of impact on an individual basis is a matter of compensation payments, but not relevant to the report. Same applies to hobby farms vs stud farms etc.
- The report uses the ABS gross value of agricultural production metrics as basis for the impact assessment, which makes the assessment comparable along the route. The data is from 2021, which is the most recent data released. It was questioned whether Covid had an impact on the data. However, as the data used for the local, regional and state level is the same database, the results are comparable.
- It was confirmed that pivotal and lateral mover irrigation systems would be able to be used under transmission lines, once constructed, subject to a prior safety assessment by AusNet. The concern was raised that the safety assessment could result in a landholder not being allowed to use irrigation, which would be a huge impact to that individual. Same applies to drone use for spraying, as there is no guarantee that spraying, and irrigation would be allowed.
- The issue of human error exacerbating the biosecurity risk during construction was raised, even if regulations and protocols are in place.
- The timeline for construction was questioned, as the report mentions impacts of less than one year. AusNet clarified that while the construction timeline for the entire project is two years, the expectation is that the impact to individual properties would be less than one, as multiple construction fronts would be set up. AusNet is considering using helicopters and drones to string the lines (which would require less ground area for construction).
- Concerns were raised that restocking and resowing is seasonal and the impact could be longer than one year. AusNet confirms that this will be considered under the compensation arrangements.
- It was questioned whether the specialists considered the impact if the route were to follow existing easements. This was not part of the scope of the report, however, the area needed for construction would be similar. There would potentially be a smaller tower footprint.

- The specialists confirmed that undergrounding of the project was not part of the scope of the report. However, AusNet assumes that undergrounding would have a greater impact, as there could be no horticulture or cropping activities in the easement, as the trench will be backfilled with thermal soil and not topsoil. Details of the undergrounding assessment are covered in chapter 5 of the EES and will outline why undergrounding is not deemed feasible.
- It was raised whether AusNet has considered the cost of drone spraying. This would be considered as part of the compensation arrangement.
- The report is currently under consideration with the TRG.

Agenda item 4	Fact sheet update, next steps
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- The next factsheets are on agricultural impacts and climate change, which were handed out to the community members for feedback.
- General feedback to date has been the font size is too small, and the background colours make it hard to read. AusNet was encouraged to adhere to the accessibility standards, which they do.
- The final version of the factsheets will be available by the end of 2024, subject to feedback from the TRG and the Department of Planning.

Agenda item 4	Community perceptions
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- One community member raised the frustration with the lack of answers and detail on some issues, given how long AusNet has been working on the EES.
- Another raised the question of whether AusNet has a Plan B, in case the EES does not get approved. VicGrid is looking into the strategic need for transmission lines and would be best placed to respond.
- At a local meeting of community volunteers, no one was in favour of the proposed project.
- A community member asked whether the CCG was a legal requirement for the project? While it is not required, AusNet committed to the CCG as part of its contract with AEMO.
- The chair raised the prospect of discussing the future of the CCG at a later meeting.

Agenda item 5	Next meeting date, topic
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- Discussion about whether the meeting should continue in person, which was favoured.
- Meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Actions	Who
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<p>AusNet to confirm the distribution of the 65% of land parcels accessed along the route.</p>	<p>AusNet</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>ACTION:</b> AusNet to share summary of members feedback and what changes have been made to fact sheets.</p>	<p>AusNet</p>