

**MINUTES  
WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP –  
MEETING #25 – 16 October 2024**

**Meeting date:** 16 October 2024  
**Meeting time:** 5.30 pm, 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
Vicki Johnson	Community member – Ballarat/CCG Central (Chair, Moorabool Central Power Alliance)
Randall Cape	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Ian Terrill	Ballarat Group of Fire Brigades – Ballarat/CCG Central
Allan Harnwell	Community member – Melton/CCG East
Martin Webb	Community member – Moorabool/CCG East
Gerard Carew	General Manager, Major Projects – AusNet Services
Carlee Grant	Stakeholder Engagement Manager – AusNet Services
Megan Cusack	Communications, Stakeholder and Land Engagement – AusNet Services
Kelly Parkinson	Risk Communication Specialist, Strategic Engagement – AusNet Services
Peter Dreimanis	Strategic Planning – City of Ballarat
Tania McIntyre	Secretariat – Premier Strategy

**Apologies**

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 the previous meeting
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- The Independent Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged Country, welcomed the attendees, presenter and secretariat, and mentioned the apologies.

The Chair reiterated the group's Terms of Reference, noting the purpose of the CCG is to enhance communications between the community and the technical team and to understand the community's concerns. It was highlighted that the group is not a decision-making body. The Chair also reminded the group of the agreed Code of Conduct.

Agenda item 2	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A: Economic Impact Assessment
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- Craig Fenton (Consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers) introduced himself to members and explained that he has been working with AusNet on the Economic Impact Assessment for the Environment Effects Statement (EES). Craig noted that he would cover EES Scoping Requirements, a Methodology Overview, the Study Area, and an Existing Conditions Summary.
- EES Scoping Requirements
  - Craig explained what is contained within the EES Scoping Requirements (as is relevant to an economic impact assessment), which covered key project issues, the existing environment, mitigation measures, likely effects and performance criteria.
  - Craig noted that, unlike some other assessments, economics does not sit in a singular category within these requirements. He explained that different elements of the EES might inform or influence how the economic impact assessment is to be undertaken. The analysis considers the types of impacts of the project (both positive and negative) and how they might translate to impacts on economic activity in the region, State and more broadly.
  - Craig highlighted that the EES is one of a portfolio of different assessments and analyses, of which the economics is only one.
- Methodology Overview
  - Craig explained that the work undertaken, and the resulting report are built from six key components:
    - Legislation, policy and guidelines
    - Existing conditions
    - Identification of economic impacts
    - Economy-wide analysis
    - Business impact analysis
    - Environmental management and report.
  - Craig highlighted that the project spans many regions and communities, all catalogued and included in the methodology. This helps to inform the economic analysis. Craig explained various modelling techniques are used to assess the macroeconomics or economy-wide type impacts. He noted that for this type of project, the modelling applied is Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) modelling, which assesses the different linkages between different sectors and regions in an economy, i.e. through supply chain, resource mobility, locations, etc., and over time. This method is quite useful for large projects where impacts are expected to be distributed both geographically and across different sectors.

- A CCG member queried how deeply the economic outcomes are assessed. For example, does the assessment consider businesses along the route or individual homes/properties? Craig explained that the assessment does not consider individual businesses or property holders. Rather, it takes into account the total number of businesses that are in each section of the study area, the types of businesses and where they are located (i.e. how far away they are from the line). Craig highlighted that AusNet is undertaking a separate workstream to explore the affected landholders.
- Members stated that a project like this would significantly impact employment, household wealth, etc., and would have a material impact on how the energy markets, locally and nationally, will operate. Craig explained that the modelling approach used is relatively standard for these types of large infrastructure projects (i.e. large linear infrastructure projects such as rail lines etc.) and includes inputs which capture the expected impacts on energy markets.
- Members requested additional information on CGE modelling. Craig explained that the Computable General Equilibrium or CGE model estimates the impact on key economic variables, including GDP, investment, consumption and employment. The model also aligns with standard methods from the Victoria and Federal governments, considers both positive, negative and direct and indirect economic outcomes and incorporates inputs from energy market modelling, qualitative analysis and other work streams.
- Members noted concerns about the locations that are considered part of the modelling, stating that the methodology should focus on the affected stakeholder's locations rather than the broader areas assessed. Craig explained that the modelling is built on one particular project proposal (with a certain cost and alignment) and a modelled impact on the relevant communities. Different project subvariants were not considered by the economic analysis.
- Members requested to be provided with the number of impacted businesses considered within the assessment. Craig noted that the number of businesses is within the thousands; however, he would need to take the question on notice as he did not have the report data at the time. **ACTION**
- A CCG member queried whether farmers are considered as businesses? Craig clarified that farmers are not considered businesses for the purposes of the business impact assessment and that a separate technical report assesses agricultural businesses. The economic modelling does however consider the proportion of agricultural land that would be impacted by the development of the project, with adverse productivity impacts included in the CGE analysis. Members voiced their concerns with this approach, stating that the true impacts of these businesses would not be accurately captured.

- Members asked whether the modelling considers alternate power sources? Craig confirmed that AEMO's energy market modelling which informing the economic modelling did assess how the project would impact on the operation of the energy market, and specifically how the energy system would have to be developed differently should the project not proceed.
- A CCG member queried whether the economic modelling tests or/ confirms AEMO's RIT-T modelling? Craig explained that the economic modelling undertaken as part of his assessment is not the same as that modelling undertaken for a RIT-T modelling, which seeks to identify the preferred project option to identify a particular energy market need.

• Study Area

- Craig explained that the study area extends across five Statistical Area 3 (SA3) regions in western Victoria and that these regions are what the demographic characteristics are based on. He noted that the direct economic impacts affect this regional economic catchment and that the broader (indirect) economic impacts are assessed across the rest of Western Victoria, Victoria and Australia.

• Existing Conditions Summary (slide 1 of 2)

- Craig explained the characteristics of the study area, noting that the CCG members would be very familiar with the region. He highlighted some aggregate statistics, including regional population, median family, household and personal incomes, and rent and mortgage payments (noting that they are lower than the state average).

• Existing Conditions Summary (slide 2 of 2)

- Craig explained the high-level synopsis on the slide, noting that the study area contains over 30 per cent of Victoria's wind energy projects, approved solar energy projects accounting for 12 per cent of all solar energy projects across Victoria and two operating battery energy storage projects, the Bulgana Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and the Ballarat BESS.
- Members asked how current the various data references are? Craig explained that it is a mix. Generally, the most current, available statistics are used, however a range of demographic statistics are used (i.e. cost estimates used are as current as possible, however a range of other demographic statistics are used are Census based).
- A member requested clarification of the study area and questioned the statement on the slide that notes that the study area covers over 30% of Victorian energy projects. CCG members highlighted that this figure would be out of date very quickly due to the energy infrastructure pipeline. How do you capture pipeline growth and factor it into analysis? Craig answered that this is a challenge for this type of analysis. He explained that the assessment considers the development of WRL, noting that its development will enable other projects to happen in the future (this is captured in the economy-wide modelling

and the supporting energy market modelling). Members raised concerns about this approach, suggesting that it represents a siloed (not a holistic) approach.

- Members observed this as concerning and noted the impacts on materials and labour. Craig explained that the modelling considers projects in and around this development and cumulative impacts on materials and labour markets.
- Members asked what impact a sudden change in government would have, i.e. if nuclear energy were introduced into the scenarios. Craig explained that no modelling is available with this scenario and that the energy market modelling would need to be redone to assess the impact of the introduction of nuclear energy.
- A CCG member challenged the data on slide four, noting that 30% of wind projects and 12% of solar projects do not apply to the project. It was highlighted that the language used within PowerPoint slides needs to be more precise so that it cannot be misconstrued.

• Summary

- Craig summarised the emerging themes arising from the analysis, including:
  - Construction Phase: Short-term disruptions to landholders and businesses; positive impacts from increased investment and employment.
  - Operation Phase: Long-term cost savings in electricity generation and transmission; potential negative impacts on some land values.
  - Decommissioning Phase: Similar economic effects as during construction but likely a lesser magnitude.
  - GDP Impact: project impact on Australia's GDP and study area GRP TBC.
  - Employment: project impact on Australia employment and study area employment TBC.
  - Business Impacts: qualitative impact assessment TBC.
- A member asked a question about short term disruptions to landholders and small businesses and whether a risk analysis matrix is undertaken to understand the intensity of the disruption. The CCG member also asked for the positive impacts of increased investment and employment to be more clearly defined and quantified. Craig explained that investment in this sense refers to an investment in the project that will cascade through supply chains to develop the project. Craig also noted that the precise impacts on employment are difficult to quantify at this stage as some of the details relating to how the project would be procured and delivered are yet to be finalised.
- Members raised concerns that benefits associated with projects such as WRL will not resonate within the regions while they shoulder the burden of the infrastructure.
- It was noted that there would be a keen interest from the community in understanding the tangible benefits of this project to the local community upon release of the EES.

- Members raised concerns regarding the devaluation of properties. Craig noted that compensation is negotiated with host landholders along the easement. He acknowledged that this is a very sensitive and difficult topic to discuss and should be addressed with AusNet. Members responded by highlighting that they felt that compensation had not been undertaken correctly to date.

Agenda item 3	Technical specialist presentation/Q&A: Transport Impact Assessment
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- Christina Emmitt (Jacobs) introduced herself to members.
- Christina noted that when explaining the impact assessment method overview, she would cover the study area, the existing conditions, risk screening and the Impact assessment.
- Study area
  - Christina explained that the Project Area extends from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. She also noted that the study area contains the road network that can be used to access the Project Area, laydown areas, and workforce accommodation facilities.
  - Christina highlighted that the study area was split into six areas by LGA.
- Existing conditions
  - Christina explained that the existing conditions include a review of relevant legislation, policy and guidelines (including the Road Management Act 2004 and National Heavy Vehicle Regulations), a review of the regional context of the major road network and traffic generators/ attractors in the Project Area, and a review of local transport provisions and conditions. Community and stakeholder feedback is also considered here.
- Risk Screening
  - Christina noted that risk screening was undertaken to identify transport-related risks associated with the Project. Key issues were identified and considered in the impact assessment, including:
    - Increased road congestion
    - Degradation of road infrastructure
    - Reduced safety for road users
- Impact Assessment (key assumptions)
  - Christina outlined the key assumptions, noting that the Project generates traffic from the following activities:
    - Construction of temporary laydown areas and workforce accommodation facilities
    - Construction of access tracks

- Construction of towers and transmission line works
- Construction/ upgrade of terminal stations
- Christina also noted that construction traffic would use major roads and connectors for as long as possible before accessing local roads and access tracks and that construction will be staged along the Project alignment; however, for the impact assessment, it has been assumed to occur simultaneously.
- Members asked if construction materials were anticipated to come through the Port of Melbourne. Christina confirmed that this would be the case for large components.
- A member asked whether rail had been considered as an alternate mode of transport. Christina confirmed that this had not been considered due to the size of some of the components.
- A member asked for clarification on the timeframe for the studies undertaken. For example, is the study run over a period of two years or more? Christina clarified that the assessments are based on peak construction periods and that trip data had been provided by AusNet and built into the modelling. Members were interested in understanding if this timeframe extends to two years to understand the long-term impacts on roads. Christina explained that multiple facets of the project and associated impacts are assessed, including road network performance and road condition impacts. AusNet committed to confirming the timeframe for these studies with CCG members.

#### ACTION

- Impact Assessment: Construction Traffic Modelling
  - Christina discussed the Construction Traffic Modelling, noting that a traffic model has been produced to assess the traffic performance of each road along the proposed construction transport route and that trip rates are used to estimate the construction traffic along each road. She noted that the construction traffic is assumed to travel from the Port of Melbourne to laydown areas and then from laydown areas to construction sites and that the modelling represents a conservative approach as not all construction traffic will occur simultaneously.
- Traffic Performance Measure: Level of Service (LOS)
  - Christina explained that the LOS has been used to measure the impacts of Project construction traffic on the operation of the road network as it captures both traffic volume changes and changes to the ratio of Volume to Capacity. She noted that it also provides a qualitative indication of network performance.
  - Assessments undertaken include:
    - Base assessment - without construction traffic (background traffic only)
    - Construction assessment - with construction traffic

- Members asked how the volume of traffic is calculated. Christina explained that this information has been provided by AusNet.
  - Members pointed out that the images of roads contained within the slide pack did not represent the local roads in the regions. They stated that large vehicles such as drilling rigs and cranes would impact the road network and asked how the potential road damage would be modelled. – how do you model the potential damage to these roads?
  - Is the modelling realistic to the actual roads? Christina explained that the images were only to be used as a visual aid and that this model represented the volume of traffic, not the road condition. Christina explained that road condition impacts are considered differently to volume impacts.
  - Members queried how congestion would be captured and modelled as in rural areas, there may be fewer cars. However, large vehicles would significantly impact the flow of vehicles on rural roads.
  - A member asked what time period the traffic flow/ volume modelling is undertaken. Christina explained that these assessments are completed during peak hour flows.
  - Members asked when the data used within these assessments were collected. Christina noted that Councils and DTP have supplied most of this data, which is publicly available information. Growth rates are applied to this data to understand current levels.
  - Members asked if the majority of construction components would be transported in the evening and how unavailable information is factored into assessments (i.e. data that reflects rural roads rather than freeways/ larger road networks). AusNet committed to returning to the group with more information on how this data is captured. **ACTION**
  - CCG members expressed interest in understanding more about logistics, the number of vehicles, the volume, and the impact on local roads.
- Road condition
    - Christina explained that local roads have been assessed to identify those which may experience degradation due to the Project. The assessment considered the existing pavement condition through a desktop review and site visits.
  - Public, school and active transport
    - Members asked whether inputs regarding local school bus routes were considered. Christina explained that available information on these routes was factored into assessments. Members highlighted concerns regarding the volume of private vehicles used to transport children to school and a lack of consideration of this data. Christina noted they would be included in traffic volume data.
  - Summary



- Christina summarised by noting that the existing conditions assessment of the transport network was used to identify the proposed construction transport route and that the traffic performance of each road along the proposed construction transport route was assessed using a traffic model, which determines the LOS of each road. She highlighted that most roads are expected to experience a minimal impact on LOS due to Project traffic and that Project traffic may impact the condition of local roads, particularly unsealed roads or roads with narrow pavements. Christina explained that potential conflicts may occur between Project traffic and public transport, school buses and active transport users due to the proximity of other road user infrastructure and services and that approval is required for heavy vehicles to use roads not on the gazetted network and all OSOM movements. Finally, Christina noted that bridges and major culverts without specified load limit data require further evaluation or approval.
- Members highlighted concerns with the use of language on the slides, such as local roads ‘may’ be impacted, noting that this project will have significant impacts on local roads.
- Members requested more information on how roads were reinstated on other large infrastructure projects and whether weather considerations are also taken into account when undertaking these assessments.
- Members asked for transparency with contractor’s proposed transport routes. AusNet committed to sharing this information publicly when it becomes available. **ACTION**
- Members asked whether the WRL EES would contain truck and transport routes similar to the Marinus Link EES. AusNet noted that there are minimum standards required by the EES that they would follow.

Agenda item 4	Community perception/questions/emerging issues
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- A CCG member flagged that CCG members feel they are not receiving the relevant information needed to progress or inform the public. The community has expressed needing further information and details on all topics. **ACTION** : AusNet to meet with Allan to further discuss the concerns.
- A CCG member presented a list of community concerns, including
  - Taxation, insurance and fire safety.
  - Concerns with contractor culture and perceivable ‘in-fighting’.
- CCG members noted that they did not feel the current factsheets were meeting the information needs of the community – relevant, clear, and readable. Members stated that it was a waste of their time reviewing the factsheets and highlighted that they were difficult to follow and were missing information. AusNet committed to raising this feedback internally.

- Members expressed frustration that they did not feel informed enough to return information to the community for feedback and were questioning the benefit of these CCG meetings.
- The Chair noted the disappointment expressed by CCG members particularly regarding the transport presentation, noting that they did not feel it reflected the local context.
- The Chair reiterated that the CCG’s objective for 2024 was to cover the significant chapters contained within the EES (as selected by the CCG) and that the next session will cover questions relating to undergrounding and how it will be represented in the EES.
- The Chair suggested that at the next CCG meeting, the group share reflections on their time in the CCG, provide some suggestions for the future, including a decision to conclude the group..
- Next meeting is on 20 November.

Agenda item 5	Project Update and Meeting Close
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- AusNet provided a printed Project Update to members; however, it was not discussed due to time constraints.
- The next meeting will be held on 20 November.
- Meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Who</b>
Existing Actions	
Questions around underground construction impacts to be sent to secretariat before a future session, so presenter can respond accordingly.	To remain <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss questions on undergrounding in the November CCG meeting, when undergrounding is the key topic.
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 <b>open</b> , an opportunity to discuss final questions will be provided once the EES is exhibited.
Discussion whether the WRL project would be covered under the VicGrid CBF framework.	AusNet to clarify whether WRL is covered. OPEN
AusNet committed to providing the CCG with a summary of how feedback from members on the technical presentations has been considered.	AusNet

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Who</b>
AusNet will investigate the options for an updated aerial map be included on the webmap.	AusNet
AusNet requested that CCG members provide information on land agent interactions and staff involvement so they could investigate	CCG Members
CCG members raised serious concerns regarding the perceived illegal access to properties and requested that AusNet provide an overview of the S93 process.	AusNet
<b>New Actions</b>	
Economic Impact Assessment: Members requested to be provided with the number of impacted businesses considered within the assessment.	Actioned. Details provided to members
Transport Impact Assessment: Members asked if the majority of construction components would be transported in the evening and how unavailable information is factored into assessments (i.e. data that reflects rural roads rather than freeways/ larger road networks). AusNet committed to returning to the group with more information on how this data is captured.	AusNet
Transport Impact Assessment: Members asked for more information regarding contractor's proposed transport routes.	AusNet
AusNet to meet with Allan to better understand the information needs of the broader community.	AusNet