
Stakeholder and community engagement

This document is an excerpt from the Scoping Report prepared for the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone Transmission project as part of the NSW planning approval process. The full report is available at:

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=PDA-48312206%2120220908T233216.666%20GMT>

www.energyco.nsw.gov.au



5 Stakeholder and community engagement

This chapter outlines engagement carried out for the project and provides a summary of views of the community and other stakeholders. This chapter also outlines engagement that is proposed to be carried out for the project.

5.1 Overview

The project is a large and complex infrastructure project with a high-level of interest from the community and key stakeholders. EnergyCo recognises the diverse engagement and information needs of the community and is committed to a robust plan of engagement that will be inclusive and encourage participation.

Engagement with communities and stakeholders about proposed new transmission network infrastructure in the Central-West Orana REZ has been ongoing since 2020.

Between December 2020 and September 2021, community consultation was carried out by Transgrid on the preliminary study corridor for new transmission network infrastructure in the Central-West Orana REZ. EnergyCo assumed responsibility for engaging communities and stakeholders for the project when it was appointed as Infrastructure Planner for the Central-West Orana REZ in November 2021. Since this time, EnergyCo has carried out a comprehensive program of community and stakeholder engagement to build on the engagement previously carried out by Transgrid.

A key aim of engagement activities to date has been to gather community and stakeholder feedback to be considered in the refinement of the study corridor and design for the project and the subsequent EIS.

The feedback received covers a wide range of issues relating to the proposed transmission network infrastructure, renewable energy developments and issues relating to the wider REZ. Key topics raised by the community included feedback on the proposed locations for transmission infrastructure, cumulative impacts on communities within the REZ, impacts to the environment and local amenity, property impacts including acquisition and land values and feedback and suggestions about community engagement activities. Local councils have raised issues in relation to community benefits, cumulative impacts from transmission and renewable generation projects, potential impacts to local business and tourism, upgrades and maintenance of local roads, waste management and construction workforce accommodation and services.

The feedback and suggestions received from the community and stakeholders have been considered in combination with engineering and environmental studies, to further refine the project study area and the development of this Scoping Report.

Engagement activities are ongoing and will continue during the preparation and exhibition of the EIS to ensure the community and stakeholders receive comprehensive updates about the project and have the opportunity to provide feedback on the project. Engagement approaches will be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are providing adequate participation opportunities and responding to stakeholder needs and expectations.

5.2 Engagement strategy

5.2.1 Engagement approach

EnergyCo will work closely with communities and stakeholders to inform the planning and delivery of the project. EnergyCo has developed a comprehensive Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for the Central-West Orana REZ which describes how engagement with the community and stakeholders will be carried out during the development of the project. The strategy is a working document that will be updated regularly as the project progresses.

EnergyCo recognises the importance of early and effective engagement with communities and stakeholders and is committed to:

- implementing a transparent, meaningful and inclusive approach to working with communities and stakeholders who are directly and indirectly affected by the project
- enabling stakeholder participation in the route identification process in a manner that is clear and transparent and ensures stakeholders understand how their feedback will be used to inform the project development process
- providing sufficient and timely information to enable communities and stakeholders to give informed feedback
- tailoring engagement and communications to consider different stakeholder needs and expectations.

EnergyCo's communication and engagement approach broadly aligns with the following documents and guidelines:

- *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects* (DPIE, 2021f)
- *Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement* (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), 2015)
- *Community Engagement Guidelines For Building Powerlines For Renewable Energy Developments – A guide for proponents, landholders and communities* (Clean Energy Council (CEC), 2018)
- *Property Acquisition Standards* (NSW Government, 2019)
- *Community Participation Plan* (DPIE, 2019b).

5.2.2 Engagement objectives

The key communication and engagement objectives for the project are to:

- provide regular and targeted information to the community and stakeholders about the progress of the project and the broader Central-West Orana REZ, including opportunities to provide feedback
- inform interested and affected communities and stakeholders about the project and its potential impacts
- ensure community and stakeholder feedback informs the project development process
- respond to enquiries, complaints and requests for information in a timely manner
- effectively manage expectations of the community and stakeholders in relation to project impacts, including cumulative impacts from the project and renewable generation projects
- promote the benefits the REZ will bring to local communities in the Central-West Orana region
- establish EnergyCo as the point of contact for the REZ as a whole
- build community and stakeholder confidence in EnergyCo and the REZ
- promote the project in the broader context of the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (DPE, 2020).

5.3 Key stakeholders

EnergyCo has identified relevant stakeholders across the project study area. Table 5-1 provides an initial list of stakeholder groups who have been or will be engaged with in relation to the project. EnergyCo expects this list to grow and diversify as the development of the project continues and the engagement broadens.

Stakeholder identification and engagement will continue throughout the development of the project and will be updated as appropriate.

Table 5-1 Key stakeholder groups for the project

| Stakeholder group | Stakeholders |
|---|--|
| NSW Government elected representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premier of NSW, the Hon Dominic Perrottet MP • Treasurer and Minister for Energy, the Hon Matthew Kean MP • Minister for Planning and Homes, Anthony Roberts MP • Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Western NSW, Member for Dubbo, Hon Dugald Saunders MP • Member for Barwon, Roy Butler MP • Member for Upper Hunter, David Layzell MP. |
| Australian Government elected representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Hon Chris Bowen MP • Member for Calare, Hon Andrew Gee MP • Member for Parkes, Hon Mark Coulton MP • Member for New England, Hon Barnaby Joyce MP. |
| Energy industry stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) • Consumer Trustee (AEMO Services) • Australian Energy Regulator (AER) • Australian Energy Market Commission • Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner • Energy Security Board • Australian Renewable Energy Agency • Australian Energy Council • Clean Energy Council • Energy Consumers Australia. |
| Local governments within the study area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Western Regional Council • Dubbo Regional Council • Warrumbungle Shire Council • Upper Hunter Shire Council • Orana Joint Organisation of Councils. |

| Stakeholder group | Stakeholders |
|--|---|
| Government departments and agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) • NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) and its divisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Crown Lands – Environment and Heritage – National Parks and Wildlife • NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) • NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet • Infrastructure NSW • Transport for NSW • Department of Regional NSW and its divisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local Land Services – Mining, Exploration and Geoscience • NSW Telco Authority • Forestry Corporation of NSW • Subsidence Advisory NSW • Heritage Council of NSW • Aboriginal Affairs NSW • Regional Development Australia • National Indigenous Australians Agency. |
| Developers of renewable generation projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proponents of renewable generation projects in the Central-West Orana REZ (existing, under approval and future). |
| Directly impacted landowners in the project study area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landowners within the project study area, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – owner occupiers – investment owners – other interest holders – mining landowners. |
| First Nations stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dubbo Local Aboriginal Land Council • Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Land Council • Mudgee Local Aboriginal Land Council • Walhallow Local Aboriginal Land Council • Wellington Local Aboriginal Land Council • Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council • National Native Title Tribunal • Three Rivers Regional Assembly (TRRA) • NTSCORP (Native Title Service Provider for Aboriginal Traditional Owners in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory) • Office of Registrar of NSW Land Claims. |
| Wider community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local land users e.g. irrigators, farmers near the project study area that are not considered directly impacted or adjacent landowners • Local communities within the Mid-Western Regional, Dubbo Regional, Warrumbungle and Upper Hunter LGAs • Road users • Community groups with an interest in the Central-West Orana REZ • Local employment and training organisations • NSW Farmers Association • Local emergency services. |
| Suppliers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW and Australian suppliers for the construction and operation of Central-West Orana REZ projects. |

| Stakeholder group | Stakeholders |
|---------------------------|--|
| Network service providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgrid • Essential Energy. |
| Other utility providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service/utility providers (e.g. electrical, telecommunications, sewer, water) that may be impacted by the project. |
| Media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Land Magazine • Mudgee Guardian • Dubbo Daily Liberal • Gulgong Gossip • Merriwa District Diary • Wellington District Leader • Coolah District Diary • Dunedoo District Diary • National media • Industry publications. |
| General public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the public who may take an interest in the project. |

5.4 Engagement to date

5.4.1 Overview

In 2020, the NSW Government engaged Transgrid, as NSW's jurisdictional transmission planner (at the time), to carry out early development work to guide the planning of new transmission infrastructure for the Central-West Orana REZ. In December 2020, Transgrid released a preliminary study area for the project that ran northwest from the existing network near Merriwa, passing south of Dunedoo before connecting to the existing network east of Wellington. The preliminary study area also included an option to extend further south near Lake Burrendong and included an upgrade of the existing substation at Wollar.

Between December 2020 and September 2021, Transgrid carried out community and stakeholder engagement on the preliminary study area for the transmission route, which included letters sent out to landowners, community information sessions, community events, social media posts and print advertisements, meetings with landowners, community members, Aboriginal stakeholders, local councils and other stakeholders, and establishment of a dedicated phone number, email address and website to provide project information.

In November 2021, the Central-West Orana REZ was formally declared by the Minister for Energy and Environment and EnergyCo was appointed as the Infrastructure Planner to lead the delivery of REZs in NSW. At this time, EnergyCo assumed responsibility for engaging local communities and stakeholders to inform the development of new transmission network infrastructure within the REZ.

In February 2022, EnergyCo announced a revised study corridor for the REZ Transmission project which would reduce impacts on sensitive land uses in the region and deliver greater capacity to meet future energy needs. Community feedback received by Transgrid was considered in developing the revised project study area. In particular, the eastern section of the preliminary study area was redesigned to locate the corridor on existing disturbed land such as mining areas, existing transmission lines and wind and solar development, to avoid high-quality agricultural land.

EnergyCo invited the community and stakeholders to provide feedback on the revised study area for the project in February and March 2022. A community feedback report was released in June 2022 which outlined the consultation outcomes and next steps.

Since early 2022, EnergyCo has continued to have ongoing direct engagement with landowners within the vicinity of the proposed route for the project to inform the design and environmental assessment process.

5.4.2 Summary of engagement activities

EnergyCo’s communication and engagement activities to date are summarised in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2 Engagement activities

| Activity | Description |
|---|---|
| Ongoing activities | |
| Dedicated phone number and email address | A dedicated email address and phone number are provided to receive and respond to enquiries from the community and interested stakeholders: Phone: 1800 032 101 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday) Email: cwo@energyco.nsw.gov.au |
| EnergyCo project website | The EnergyCo project website (energyco.nsw.gov.au) provides information on the project background and need (including details about the Central-West Orana REZ), how the community can get involved, community consultation that has been carried out and links to project documents. The project is updated regularly as new information becomes available. |
| Landowner engagement | Ongoing direct engagement has been carried out with landowners to inform the development of the project, including relevant mining companies. |
| Stakeholder meetings and briefings | Regular briefings have been carried out with key stakeholders including local councils, elected representatives, agencies and stakeholder groups to discuss matters relating to the project and broader REZ issues, including cumulative impact strategies and community benefit initiatives. EnergyCo holds regular briefings with a number of important key stakeholders including generation projects, local mine operators, local councils, government agencies and elected representatives. |
| Stakeholder management database | Records of all stakeholder correspondence have been maintained in the project’s stakeholder management database (Consultation Manager). |
| Field work notifications | Notifications of field investigation work have been provided to landowners in the vicinity of where field work will be carried out between mid-2022 and mid-2023, including survey, geotechnical and environmental investigations to inform the EIS and design for the project. These are also published on the project website. |
| Cumulative impact studies | EnergyCo is coordinating whole of REZ studies including workforce accommodation, roads and transport, telecommunications, training and skills, waste and circular economy and social infrastructure. These studies will identify measures to manage REZ-wide cumulative impacts, with further details to be provided in the EIS. EnergyCo has been carrying out interviews with stakeholders as part of these studies. |
| February / March 2022 consultation | |
| Project overview | A project overview document was published on 25 February 2022 to inform people about the project and explain the next steps. The document was made available online and in hard copy format at engagement events. It contains information about the background and need for the project, Central-West Orana REZ, EnergyCo, route identification process, planning and approval process, property acquisition, planned community and stakeholder consultation, contact details and figures and maps of the REZ, preliminary project study area and proposed transmission infrastructure. |
| Media release | Media release was distributed to local and regional media outlets on 25 February 2022 announcing the revised preliminary project study area. |
| Letter to landowners | Letters were sent out to about 350 landowners within the revised study corridor to inform them about the project and invite feedback. |

| Activity | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| Advertisements | Print advertisements were published in late February and early March in the Daily Liberal, Mudgee Guardian and Gulgong Advertiser to promote the project and provide opportunities for engagement. |
| Information sessions | Six drop-in information sessions were held for community members to meet the project team and ask questions. These were attended by about 130 individuals. The sessions were held in local venues at Wellington, Gulgong and Dunedoo. |
| Stakeholder briefings | Briefings were conducted with local councils and key industry stakeholders, including elected representatives, organisations and interest groups. The briefings included presentations and discussions on the need for the project, any upcoming planning issues that all parties should be aware of, how stakeholders would like to be engaged, and any other relevant topics. |

June 2022 Registered Aboriginal Party advertising

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Advertising | <p>Print advertisements requesting registration of First Nations stakeholders interested in the project published in the following newspapers during mid-June:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koori Mail • Mudgee Guardian and Gulgong Advertiser • Dubbo Daily Liberal • Dunedoo District Diary • Merriwa District Diary • Western Magazine • Coolah District Diary • Wellington District Leader. |
| Direct letters | Letters were sent directly to First Nations stakeholders inviting them to become a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the project. |

June 2022 project update

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Project update | A project update newsletter was published on EnergyCo's website on 27 June 2022. It was distributed via letterbox distribution to properties in the study area in early July via Australia Post. The project update was used to inform people about the current status of the project and next steps, including an invitation for community members to submit applications for the Central-West Orana REZ Community Reference Group. |
| E-newsletter | An e-newsletter was sent to about 200 registered community members and key stakeholders. |
| Website update | Updated project information was uploaded to EnergyCo's website. |
| Community feedback report | A community feedback report was published on EnergyCo's website which summarises the consultation carried out in February and March 2022 on the revised study corridor. |
| Advertisements | <p>Print advertisements were published in early July to promote the project update and invite applications to join the Community Reference Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mudgee Guardian and Gulgong Advertiser • Dubbo Daily Liberal • The Land • Dunedoo District Diary • Merriwa District Diary • Western Magazine • Coolah District Diary • Wellington District Leader. |

5.4.3 Agency consultation

Consultation was carried out with the following NSW Government agencies:

- meetings were held with DPE during July and August 2022 to introduce the project
- a meeting was held with the Biodiversity Conservation and Science (BCS) Directorate within DPE to discuss the approach to biodiversity field surveys and assessment
- NSW Crown Lands was consulted about easement and property acquisition matters on Crown Land
- Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) was engaged about property access to lands managed by FCNSW
- a meeting was held with Subsidence Advisory NSW in May 2022 to identify subsidence related design requirements for the project as it is located in a mine subsidence district
- meetings were held with NSW Government agencies in July and August 2022 to inform EnergyCo's cumulative impact studies for the REZ. This included DPE, Department of Regional NSW, Department of Education, Investment NSW, Transport for NSW and Department of Communities and Justice
- consultation was also carried out with a number of Australian Government agencies, including engagements on biodiversity and environmental approvals (DCCEEW), and matters of employment (Department of Education, Skills and Employment)
- energy regulators, such as AEMO and AER, and other key stakeholders were engaged by EnergyCo in a regulatory consultation process, focusing on project investment.

5.4.4 Working groups

EnergyCo is in the process of establishing a number of working groups that will inform the development of the Central-West Orana REZ, as detailed below.

Community Reference Group

EnergyCo established a Community Reference Group in August 2022 to provide an open forum for discussion between EnergyCo, community representatives and key stakeholders in relation to the project and Central-West Orana REZ. The Community Reference Group will discuss matters relating to the planning and delivery of the project, as well as broader REZ issues.

The objectives of the Community Reference Group are to:

- establish good working relationships and promote information-sharing between EnergyCo, local community representatives and key stakeholders
- provide Community Reference Group members with visibility of the project and enable them to share project information via their networks
- keep members informed about project activities, key milestones and opportunities to provide feedback
- provide an avenue for EnergyCo to seek community and stakeholder input on project matters
- allow community members to seek information from EnergyCo and provide feedback.

The Community Reference Group consist of:

- an Independent Chairperson who acts as the convenor, facilitator, mediator and advisor for the Community Reference Group. The Independent Chairperson acts independently and impartially and is the key point of contact between the Community Reference Group and EnergyCo
- four community representatives who are current residents and/or landowners in the REZ
- five representatives from local community or stakeholder groups.

In addition, representatives from local councils and LALCs are invited to participate in the Community Reference Group, including Dubbo Regional Council, Warrumbungle Shire Council, Mid-Western Regional Council, Upper Hunter Shire Council, Dubbo LALC, Mudgee LALC, Gilgandra LALC, Wellington LALC, Walhallow LALC and Wanaruah LALC. It is at these organisations' discretion if they nominate to attend the Community Reference Group meetings.

Developers of generation projects will be invited to participate in the Community Reference Group on a regular basis to discuss matters such as the management of cumulative impacts within the REZ. Other non-Community Reference Group members, such as individuals or stakeholder organisations with specific remits and expertise, will be invited to join Community Reference Group meetings as appropriate.

Once appointed, the future Network Operator of the project will participate in the Community Reference Group.

The first meeting of the Community Reference Group was held on 1 September 2022 in Dubbo, and future meetings will be held at least once per quarter, with the meeting dates and times to be agreed upon by the Community Reference Group members.

First Nations Working Group

EnergyCo will establish a First Nations Working Group to support and coordinate local Aboriginal community engagement and negotiations during the planning and development phase.

The First Nations Working Group would consist of First Nations stakeholders such as First Nations groups, organisations and landowners.

Industry Working Group

The Industry Working Group (the former Regional Reference Group) for the CWO REZ will be re-established to focus on matters related to:

- the design and development of the project and the Central-West Orana REZ, including ways to secure enduring benefits and regional development opportunities
- issues and concerns held by regional stakeholders and how these may be managed, including cumulative impacts
- regional strategies including workforce accommodation, employment and training, operational impacts from construction and the use of regional assets.

The Industry Working Group will include:

- local MPs
- government agencies
- local councils
- major renewable energy generators
- NSW Electricity Jobs Advocate.

Generator Project Interface Group

The Generator Project Interface Group has been established to manage the interface and cumulative impacts of the major renewable energy generators and the project. Participants will consist of EnergyCo and major generators, including:

- Acciona Energy
- CWP Renewables
- Lightsource BP
- Marble Energy
- Origin Energy
- RES Group
- Tilt Renewables
- ACEN Australia.

5.5 Feedback received to date

Feedback received from communities and stakeholders to date has been used to inform various aspects of the project.

5.5.1 Community views

In June 2022, EnergyCo published a consultation report (EnergyCo, 2022) outlining community feedback received and EnergyCo's responses to the revised study corridor consultation carried out in February and March 2022.

In total, 35 submissions were received from landowners and community members and organisations during the engagement period. This feedback was received in writing via email and through feedback forms which were made available at the drop-in information sessions.

In addition to receiving feedback through formal submissions from landowners, EnergyCo also collected additional informal feedback about landowner sentiment and community views through direct discussion with landowners and other community members at the drop-in information sessions held in early March 2022.

Of the 35 submissions received during the consultation period, 22 were from local landowners within the project study area. Three of these landowners said they were interested in hosting transmission infrastructure, while 16 indicated they were opposed to hosting transmission infrastructure on their land. Three did not indicate a preference in their submission.

The feedback received covered a wide range of issues relating to the project, renewable energy developments and the wider Central-West Orana REZ. Key topics raised included:

- feedback on the proposed locations for transmission infrastructure
- cumulative impacts to communities within the Central-West Orana REZ
- impacts to the environment and local amenity
- property impacts including acquisition and land values
- feedback and suggestions about community engagement activities.

Since this time, EnergyCo has continued to have ongoing direct engagement with landowners who may be potentially affected by the project. This includes meeting with landowners to gauge their sentiment about hosting transmission infrastructure. Landowner sentiment has formed a critical part of the route selection process to date and will continue as EnergyCo further refines the transmission route. Sentiment mapping to date indicates a high level of support for the proposed corridor.

The community and stakeholders have provided a variety of feedback across numerous themes. Table 5-3 provides a high-level overview of the feedback received by theme and the frequency that feedback within the theme was received.

Table 5-3 Community feedback themes

| Topic | Key items raised and number of submissions received |
|---|---|
| Design | |
| Locations for transmission infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition to hosting transmission infrastructure (11) • Opposition to the use of prime agricultural land (4) • Supportive of the corridor moving away from the Merriwa Cassilis plateau (4) • Supportive of hosting transmission infrastructure (3) • Supportive of the revised study corridor using public land, mining land and existing power line easements (3). |
| Socio-economic | |
| Cumulative impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative impacts from renewable energy projects (6) • Cumulative impacts due to existing coal mines (2). |
| Impacts to agriculture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General concern about impacts to agriculture (4) • Impacts to aerial agricultural activities near transmission lines (3). |
| Community benefits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions on how funding for community benefits should be delivered (2). |
| Societal impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about community division and mental health impacts (3). |
| General | |
| Project governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EnergyCo's role in coordinating the REZ (3). |
| Renewable energy generation projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consultation on generation projects (1) • How will generators connect into the REZ infrastructure (1). |
| Environment | |
| General environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General concern about environmental impacts from the project (5). |
| Biodiversity offsets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity offset areas should be avoided (3). |
| Visual amenity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General visual amenity impacts as a result of the project (3). |
| Flora and fauna | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about wildlife impacts (3) • Threatened species habitat should be avoided (2). |
| Health impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about electric and magnetic fields (1). |
| Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural heritage sites should be avoided (1). |
| Property | |
| Acquisition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that compensation will be insufficient or inequitable in comparison to hosting renewable generation infrastructure (4). |
| Property values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about impacts to property values in the area (2). |
| Community engagement | |
| Feedback and suggestions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An information session should have been held in Coolah (2) • Concern that landowners were not adequately informed about the revised study corridor consultation (2) • Concern about lack of consultation in declaring the REZ (2) • Negative feedback about website and communication collateral (2). |
| Construction | |
| Road maintenance & upgrades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about who will be responsible for road maintenance. |
| Worker accommodation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker accommodation and services (1). |
| Construction fatigue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary impacts during construction (1). |

5.5.2 Councils

EnergyCo regularly meets with councils to discuss the development of the Central-West Orana REZ, including Mid-Western Regional Council, Dubbo Regional Council, Warrumbungle Shire Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council. A range of issues are discussed during these meetings, with particular focus on cumulative impacts within the REZ. Key topics discussed with councils include:

- workforce accommodation and services required to support the Central-West Orana REZ transmission and generation projects
- impacts to council assets including local roads, waste management and utilities
- opportunities to provide legacy initiatives for local communities.

EnergyCo is consulting councils on a series of studies to inform how cumulative impacts in the Central-West Orana REZ will be managed. The studies cover a range of issues which EnergyCo has identified as priorities to the community:

- workforce accommodation
- road upgrades and traffic management
- training and skills
- waste management
- mobile connectivity
- social infrastructure.

Feedback received from councils as part of the studies will be used to identify mitigation strategies for managing cumulative impacts in the Central-West Orana REZ.

EnergyCo will continue to work closely with councils on cumulative impact strategies and other issues as the project progresses, including during the preparation and exhibition of the EIS.

5.5.3 Agency feedback

In July 2022, EnergyCo discussed the conceptual scope of the project with DPE, including the approach to the 330 kV REZ network infrastructure, project program, as well as key issues raised by the DPE.

DPE confirmed the need for effective community and stakeholder engagement and detailed field surveys for biodiversity and heritage to support impact assessments by relevant regulators.

In May 2022, a meeting was held with Subsidence Advisory NSW to identify subsidence related design requirements for projects located in a mine subsidence district. Subsidence Advisory NSW outlined the approval process, that would include a review of the design in consultation with the mine lease holder, and timeframes relevant to the project.

5.5.4 Traditional owners and other Aboriginal groups

EnergyCo is committed to meaningful and genuine consultation and engagement with First Nations communities during the development and delivery of the project in accordance with the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (DPE, 2020).

In August 2022, the Minister for Energy issued guidelines on consultation with First Nations communities for energy infrastructure delivered under the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap, including the Central-West Orana REZ (Energy NSW, 2022).

These guidelines, required under section 4(1) of the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* (the enabling legislation of the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap), build on, but not replace, existing consultation requirements under other legislation, in particular the NP&W Act and the Australian Government *Native Title Act 1993*.

EnergyCo and the DPE worked with First Nations advisors to engage with local First Nations communities on the development of the guidelines.

A First Nations Working Group comprised of Aboriginal community representatives, LALCs, Aboriginal working parties, government support services and local First Nations organisations will be established. The working group will aim to support and coordinate local First Nations community engagement during the planning and development phase of the REZ Transmission project (refer to Section 5.4.4).

In June 2022, EnergyCo sent notification letters to First Nations stakeholders, including LALCs, National Native Title Tribunal, NTS Corp, Office of the Registrar of NSW Land Claims, Local Land Services and local councils, to provide information about the project and invite Aboriginal knowledge holders to become a RAP for the project. Print advertisements requesting registration of First Nations stakeholders interested in the project were also published in a number of local newspapers during mid-June 2022 (refer to Table 5-2).

RAP representatives have participated in field surveys with EnergyCo's heritage consultants to provide feedback on Aboriginal heritage values in the project study area to inform the design of the project and location of infrastructure.

5.6 How feedback has been used

The feedback and suggestions received from the community and stakeholders have been considered in combination with engineering, environmental, land use and social studies, to further refine the project study area and inform the development of this Scoping Report. Community and landowner feedback has formed a key role in the initial development and refinement of the transmission corridor.

5.7 Future engagement

5.7.1 Engagement approach

Engagement will continue on specific issues and opportunities relevant to the project to inform the preparation of the EIS, in accordance with *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects* (DPIE, 2021f). EnergyCo is committed to continue to engage landowners, the community and stakeholders throughout all project stages and to build and maintain strong relationships within the communities where the proposed transmission infrastructure will be located.

The next stage of community and stakeholder engagement will build on relationships established through early engagement activities and will complement and support formal consultation required under planning regulations, including activities that may be stipulated in the SEARs and in the preparation of the EIS as well as for cumulative impacts, social benefits, and other milestones related to the development of the Central-West Orana REZ.

The general project information and feedback mechanisms summarised in Table 5-2 will continue to be available during further design development and preparation of the EIS. These mechanisms will be complemented with further direct community and stakeholder engagement activities focused on:

- providing information and project updates at key stages during design development and preparation of the EIS
- engagement with affected landowners and community groups about the project and key design decisions that may impact them
- engagement and coordination with generation projects in the Central-West Orana REZ, particularly around project interfaces and in relation to cumulative impacts
- engagement with regulatory agencies during preparation of the EIS to ensure a complete and robust EIS.

The Network Operator will lead community and stakeholder engagement during future stages of project development, following their appointment in mid-2023 (refer to Section 1.5).

5.7.2 Preparation of the EIS

Key stakeholders

EnergyCo will continue to work closely with councils to manage any impacts to council assets, as well as engaging with them to develop community benefit sharing opportunities and strategies to mitigate cumulative impacts to local communities and businesses.

EnergyCo is establishing a number of working groups for the project to promote engagement with local communities, First Nations stakeholders, government, industry, major renewable energy generators and other key stakeholders during the development of the project (refer to Section 5.4.4).

Engagement activities

The following community and stakeholder engagement mechanisms and activities will occur/continue to occur during the preparation of the EIS, either in person or via digital platforms:

- one-on-one meetings
- stakeholder briefings
- direct engagement with landowners to access private property for field work including geotechnical investigations, ecology, cultural heritage surveys, hydrological surveys
- community information sessions
- stakeholder and community group presentations and briefings
- EnergyCo toll-free community information number, email address and project webpage
- interactive project map outlining key features and up to date information about the project
- communications materials (project overview document, newsletters, letters and factsheets)
- e-newsletter
- media releases and advertisements
- social media
- field work notifications
- cumulative impact studies.

All stakeholder engagement will continue to be collected and recorded in a structured and formal manner. Engagement approaches will be evaluated and reviewed on a quarterly basis or as needed to ensure they are providing adequate participation opportunities and responding to stakeholder needs and expectations. Regular community and stakeholder check-ins will also be conducted to track engagement performance, sentiment and issues of concern and opportunity.

The EIS will include details of issues raised during engagement with the community and other stakeholders. It will also clearly identify where these issues have been responded to through the design development process and the EIS.

5.7.3 Exhibition of the EIS

Public exhibition of the EIS will be for a minimum of 28 days as stated in section 5.17 of the EP&A Act. Advertisements will be placed in local media giving information regarding the project and display of the EIS. During the exhibition period, government agencies, stakeholders and the community will be able to review the EIS and will have the opportunity to make a written submission to the DPE for consideration in its assessment of the project.

Consultation activities during the public exhibition of the EIS will be consistent with those undertaken for the Scoping Report and will include:

- community information sessions
- local newspaper advertising
- project website updates and online tools and resources
- letterbox distribution
- stakeholder meetings
- government stakeholder engagement.

Interactive map

An interactive map will be made available on the EnergyCo project website. This will provide an online tool to show the project study area and other geographical information about the project and explore the key outcomes of the EIS through interactive mapping. The interactive map will also allow its viewers to:

- relate the project to the broader geographic context
- analyse multiple datasets for the project simultaneously
- view up-to-date information about the project
- use specialised tools for retrieving information.

Project notifications and updates

As part of the exhibition of the EIS, EnergyCo will publish and distribute information to communicate the EIS. This will include:

- project update newsletter
- EIS guide and fact sheets
- website update and online tools and resources
- advertising in local media outlets
- e-newsletter
- media release
- display information at drop-in community information sessions.

5.7.4 Construction of the project

Should the project be approved, EnergyCo would continue to consult with stakeholders and the community during construction in accordance with the conditions of approval. Further information about the consultation activities and tools during the construction phase will be provided in the EIS.

EnergyCo is also in the process of undertaking a competitive tender process for the appointment of a Network Operator, who would be responsible for the design, construction, financing, operation and maintenance of the Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure (refer to Section 1.5). The preferred Network Operator will be responsible for compliance of the project with planning approval requirements under the EP&A Act and engagement with communities and stakeholders about project-related matters during construction and operation.