

THUNDERBOLT ENERGY HUB WIND FARM CCC
COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
MEETING 2

WEDNESDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2021
3:30PM – 6:30PM

LOCATION
ON-LINE

Chair:	Dr W.E.J. Paradice AM
Members	
Community:	Wayne Ames; Angus Carter; James Croft; Chris Page; Phillip Roberts
Councils:	Clr Eric Noakes; Clr Natasha Ledger (Kate Jessep Alt); Sam Lobsey
Neoen:	Joanna Murphy; Matthew Parton
Minute taker:	Anne-Marie Ward

Agenda item	Responsibility
1 Welcome and Introductions	Chair

The Chair welcomed all members and thanked presenters for their attendance.
 Today we have Bill Wallach and Sarah Bell from Umwelt to present information about the Biodiversity and Social Impact Assessments being done for the project.

2 Apologies	Chair
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Wayne Ames, Angus Carter, Eric Noakes were apologies.
 James Croft had to leave at 4:15pm
 Natasha Ledger was having trouble logging in, so Kate Jessep attended as the alternate member. Kate asked if she could stay online if/when Natasha is able to log on – the Chair agreed that this would be fine. Natasha managed to log in via phone at 4:10pm and then online from 4:30pm.

3 Declaration of pecuniary interest	Chair
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The Chair made it clear to the committee that he is an independent chair appointed by the NSW Department of Planning, but the proponent pays expenses related to the role.
 Phill Roberts declared that he may benefit from the solar component of the project as he is a landholder impacted by the solar proposal in Stage 2. Anne-Marie Ward (Thunderbolt Energy Hub Community Engagement Officer) is the paid minute taker of this group as arranged between the Chair and Proponent.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting	Chair
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The Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and declared final via email as discussed at the first meeting. They are being made available on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website asap.

Joanna Murphy went through the business arising from the previous minutes:

- *Possibility of having a connection expert e.g., Neoen connection expert or Transgrid or REZ Roadmap Team to present at the next meeting. Neoen to enquire as to who the most appropriate group would be to provide information to this group.*

Neoen can organise for a connections expert from Neoen to attend and discuss the current state of the network and how this might change when more projects are connected. Neoen has reached out to the REZ Roadmap Team who have said they would be willing to attend a later CCC meeting.

Today we have Bill Wallach and Sarah Bell from Umwelt to present information about the Biodiversity and Social Impact Assessments being done for the project. Umwelt has been engaged since 2020 and will continue with their assessments after the Development Application has been put in. The presentations from both are attached.

- *Add CCC members to the communication register so that they receive information/newsletters at the same time as everyone else.*

CCC members' emails were added to the communication register. There was a quick check done and James Croft indicated that he had not received the latest information.

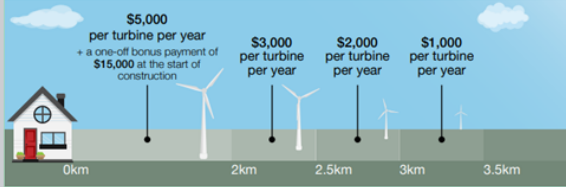
Action: Check James Croft is in the register correctly.

- *Neoen to investigate website traffic and provide information to the CCC.*

Website traffic information was presented to the meeting. There were 438 visitors to the site (up 30%) in the last 90 days. Just over 80% of those were new users. The chart of this information is in the attached presentation.

- *Neoen will investigate possibility of creating a comparison chart with nearby projects to provide further information on this issue for the next meeting.*

A Wind Farm Benefit Sharing Comparison Table was presented.

Project Name	Status	Size (MW)	Community Benefit Fund	Other benefit
Thunderbolt Wind Farm	Proposed	200	\$3125/turbine \$100k total	
Winterbourne Wind Farm	Proposed	700	Amount not announced	<p>From the Winterbourne Wind Farm Website: <i>"In an innovative benefits sharing model, WalchaWind Pty Ltd — a private company owned by a group of local landowners — holds 5% of the project. WalchaWind has committed to sharing the benefits it receives with project neighbours and the broader Walcha community, providing durable financial and social benefits."</i></p>
Doughboy Wind Farm	Proposed	300	No detail on website	No detail on website
Hills of Gold Wind Farm	Proposed	420	\$2,500/turbine \$175,000 cap	Community Enhancement Fund: \$2,500 per wind turbine per year installed and operating (up to \$175,000)
Sapphire Wind Farm	Operating	270	\$2433/turbine \$182,500 total	Community co-investment (6% return for 9.5 years)
White Rock Wind Farm	Operating	175	\$2,500/turbine \$175,000 total	

The Neoen Community Benefit Fund amount in this table is for Stage 1. Previously there was an amount of \$200 000 listed as this was for the whole project that was initially proposed. This information is in the attached presentation.

- *Neoen will provide an outline of the decommissioning process to the next meeting.*

Neoen has contractually committed to the host landholder that it will decommission the wind farm, Neoen must do this within 24-months.

Decommissioning includes removing all of:

- Wind Turbines,
- Electrical Substations,
- Power lines (above ground and underground),
- Roads,
- Operation and Maintenance Facilities,
- Fences,
- Signage,
- And anything else on the site.

With respect to wind turbine foundations, which cannot be removed, Neoen must cut off and cover these. Wind turbines are decommissioned in the exact reverse of how they are constructed, with cranes removing components from the top down.

This information is in the attached presentation.

- *Neoen will respond to the information in the advertisement at the next meeting.*

A table was presented outlining the main points that had been in the advertisement that was provided at the previous meeting (sent out with the Apsley Advocate) and giving Neoen's response to the information.

Article comment	Neoen's comment
466 wind turbines and 10.2 million solar panels are proposed within a 70km radius of Walcha...	The turbine numbers matches the public information that Neoen has seen on public websites. Neoen does not know how the figure of 10.2 million panels was arrived at. Neoen notes that proposals are not the same as projects, and there is no certainty that all of these projects will proceed.
The Renewable Energy Trust (RET) will subsidise the eligible companies \$500,000 per wind turbine a year for approx. 15 years or whenever the 9.3 billion dollars has expired	The NSW coal fleet is closing. The NSW Government has announced it will run competitive tenders and will underwrite the most competitive projects to ensure there is enough electricity supply in the state. The main objectives of these tenders are to incentivise investment and protect the financial interests of NSW electricity consumers. Rent payments are not determined by State but through commercial negotiation between companies (such as Neoen) and the host landholder.
Hosts, being landholders that have entered into a contract with the developer to have wind turbines on their land, will receive \$15,000 to \$30,000 per turbine per year in NSW. In QLD they will receive \$60,000 per year per turbine.	Commercial agreements with wind turbine hosts are confidential, so Neoen cannot comment on this statement.
Part quote from the Wind Commissioner, Andrew Dyer: "Fees for hosting a wind turbine for 25 years is in the range of \$250,000 to \$625,000 (depending on the turbine capacity)..."	Neoen have built in decommissioning clauses in all agreements with host landholders. Neoen is obliged to decommission a project after the operations phase is completed. This is also a condition of the NSW Government's development approval.
No laws in Australia making developers or operators responsible for removing these wind turbines. This would reduce their profit margins if they were made to decommission the turbines.	Neoen do not on-sell our projects.
A developer will on sell the business to another company. This could be a nightmare for the host.	Australia has never had an abandoned wind farm, or even an abandoned wind turbine. The oldest Australian wind farms are described in the table on the next slide.
No protection for the host. After 20 years the chances are high that the company has been sold to an overseas company and that this company will go into voluntary liquidation which the Australian Government can't do anything about. The host will be left with a massive clean up bill to remove turbines and rehabilitate the native vegetation.	Neoen is committed to identifying recycling channels for all our activities and integrates a recycling commitment clause into all new supply agreements. The wind turbine manufacturers are pro-actively developing solutions to turbine waste, For example, earlier this year Vestas announced a new technology which will enable blades to be fully recyclable.
Why should rate payers have to foot the bill for all the waste. It is the Council's responsibility to take care of the waste that is not recyclable. They would have to build massive land fill sites for these 80m to 100m blades which are made of carbon fibre (non recyclable).	

With respect to the underwriting of renewable energy projects by the NSW Government (point 2), Neoen is happy to circulate a link to the report so that the CCC can see what the NSW government is trying to do. This information is in the attached presentation.

Action: Neoen will provide CCC members with a link to the NSW Government for further report information.

Kate Jessep asked for further information about decommissioning as this is a major community concern – what's the surety as 30 years is a long time away. Neoen provided further information for the project's decommissioning process. Neoen owns and operates their projects for the long term (do not on-sell as a rule), this is how they are able to put into the landholder contracts that there is a possibility of extending the lease agreements beyond 30 years. Decommissioning is part to the landholder agreements and part of Neoen's responsibility to the NSW government so there are contractual and permitting obligations.

The Chair asked for further clarification on a quote from the wind commissioner listed in the advertisement in the Apsley Advocate. There is only the information in the advertisement, Neoen is unsure where that quote came from.

Further information was provided on Australia's Wind Farm Track Record as part of the second last statement around removal of turbines.

Wind farm	State	Capacity (MW)	Years Operating	Current status
Salmon Beach	WA	0.360	(15) 1987	Decommissioned
Esperance 10 mile Lagoon Wind Farm	WA	2.025	28	Operating
Denham	WA	1.02	24	Operating
Huxley Hill	TAS	2.45	23	Operating
Crookwell Wind Farm	NSW	4.8	21	Operating
Windy Hill	QLD	12	21	Operating
Blayney Wind Farm	NSW	9.9	20	Operating
Albany	WA	21.6	20	Operating
Hampton Wind Park	NSW	1.32	20	Operating
Codrington Wind Farm	VIC	18.2	19	Operating
Toora Wind Farm	VIC	21	19	Operating
Woolnorth Wind Farm	TAS	64.75	18	Operating

6	Project Overview and Update	Neoen
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Neoen provided a couple of updates on the project:

Anne-Marie Ward will be at the Kentucky Hall for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub Info Sessions today through to Saturday. Unfortunately, due to lockdown no-one is able to attend from Canberra. Joanna Murphy and several other colleagues will be available online during that time given the current restrictions. There are also some webinars via Zoom as well. Neoen and some of the project specialists will provide project updates and there will be a public Q&A at the end.

The Neighbour Benefits Program has been announced for neighbours within 3.5km of wind turbines as recognition of having their view impacted. It is in addition to the Community Benefits Program.

It was emphasised that this does not stop the neighbours from objecting to the project or making future complaints. There are no strings attached to this payment.

Some questions arose:

Are these payments fixed and are they indexed? They are Fixed.

Neighbour Benefits



EXAMPLE NEIGHBOUR PAYMENT

In this example, there are 2 wind turbines proposed within 2-2.5km from a neighbour's dwelling, 4 turbines between 2.5-3km and 1 turbine within 3-3.5km.



Their annual neighbour benefits payment would be: **\$15,000 each year**

$$(\$3,000 \times 2) + (\$2,000 \times 4) + (\$1,000 \times 1)$$

James Croft had to leave for another meeting at this point.

- Guest presenter: Bill Wallach, Ecology

Umwelt have been engaged by Neoen in 2020 to complete the biodiversity assessment. Bill provided a snapshot of the Biodiversity Assessment in Stage 1.

Under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2017* (BC Act), the biodiversity assessment is being completed in accordance with the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) 2020.

The BAM requires:

1. Consultation with state and federal agencies
2. Extensive field surveys, including vegetation and threatened species
3. Preparation of a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report
4. Avoid, Minimise and/or Mitigate impacts to biodiversity values
5. Offset any residual impacts to biodiversity values

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) Referral

- Assessment Bilateral Agreement between NSW and Commonwealth governments sees the Project assessed under the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme
- A Referral under the EPBC Act to enable the Minister to determine if the Project will need assessment and approval under the EPBC Act.
- Considers the impacts of the Project on Matters of National Environmental Significance, being EPBC Act listed species and ecological communities
- Assesses whether the impact is or has the potential to be significant, via detailed supporting document and Assessments of Significance in line with 'Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1'
- The Referral for the Project has been prepared

Biodiversity Surveys – methods

- May, August, October and December 2020

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- February, March and August 2021...more to come
 - 32 Floristic Plots
 - 106 Rapid Vegetation Assessments
 - 185 General Observation Points
 - Targeted flora species transects
 - Targeted reptile surveys
 - Nocturnal spotlighting and call playback surveys (frogs, forest owls, mammals)
 - Targeted call playback and bird surveys for regent honeyeater and swift parrot
 - Targeted habitat surveys for forest cockatoos
 - Two rounds of Bird and Bat Utilisation Surveys
 1. Four sites in May 2020 – birds surveyed twice, and bats surveyed across three nights
 2. Four sites in February 2021 – birds surveyed twice, and bats surveyed across 29 nights
 - 10 remote survey cameras deployed for 29 nights (290 survey nights)

Biodiversity Surveys – results

- Bluegrass (*Dicanthium setosum*) and McKie's Stringybark (*Eucalyptus mckieana*) – Vulnerable BC Act/EPBC Act
- Speckled warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*), Dusky woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus cyanopterus*), Scarlett robin (*Petroica boodang*), Diamond firetail (*Stagonopleura guttata*) – Vulnerable BC Act
- *White box - yellow box - Blakely's red gum grassy woodlands and derived native grasslands* Critically Endangered Ecological Community (CEEC) EPBC Act / *White box yellow box Blakely's red gum grassy woodland and derived native grassland* CEEC BC Act
- *New England Peppermint (Eucalyptus nova-anglica) grassy woodlands* CEEC EPBC ACT / *New England Peppermint (Eucalyptus nova-anglica) Woodland on Basalts and Sediments in the New England Tableland Bioregion* CEEC BC Act

What's next?

- Additional surveys spring 2021 and summer 2021/22
- Consultation with state and federal agencies
- Submission of the Referral, available for public comment
- Biodiversity Development Assessment Report, including:
 1. Plant Community Type allocation
 2. Detailed Threatened Ecological Community analysis
 3. GIS Mapping
 4. Assessments of prescribed impacts
 5. Operation and submission of online BAM – Credit Calculator
- Offset strategy including potential local land-based offsets

- Guest presenter: Sarah Bell, Social Impact Assessment

Sarah provided an overview of a Social Impact Assessment for the project and what will be happening.

1. A **Social Impact Assessment (SIA)** is the process of analysing, assessing and responding to the potential social impacts of a proposed development, with a view to minimising negative social impacts and enhancing positive social impacts
2. DPIE has recently released a **Social Impact Assessment Guideline** (2021) that provides direction on assessing the potential community and social impacts of State Significant Development projects across NSW
3. **SIA is participatory**: respectful, inclusive and meaningful engagement with potentially affected people and other interested parties is a fundamental component of good SIA practice
4. The SIA is undertaken in parallel with the EIS and will help to inform project design and planning.

Social Impacts Assessments look and what impacts the project has on people, including Way of Life, Community, Accessibility, Culture, Health & Wellbeing, Surroundings, Livelihoods, Decision making systems and Way of Life.

The Social Impact Assessment is under way and members were encouraged to be involved in this process

and provide the following information to any community members wishing to be involved.

How to get involved?

1. **Community Feedback Survey:** Your feedback is greatly appreciated and will inform the SIA to be assessed by DPIE, see link or QR code to complete <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/neoenthunderbolt>
2. **Service Provider and Local Business Survey:** to be rolled out in September, please use contact details below to be involved
3. **SIA Meetings:** consultation with community groups will take place over September
4. **Broader community consultation is ongoing for the Project:** personal or small group meetings can be arranged for those interested in participating further or by providing more detailed feedback

If anyone would like to speak with someone from the SIA team directly, please contact social-team@umwelt.com.au or call our SIA consultant on 0436 674 277

7	Questions and clarification	Chair
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Sam Lobsey flagged that councils have difficulty with the 30-day timeline for their response particularly around the biodiversity area. Is there a way of getting information earlier so that they would have more time to formulate a response? Neoen will think about how they might be able to assist councils with their process. Currently it looks like the only formal peer review will be on Noise. Umwelt offered to send some information that might assist councils in knowing what their reports require.

Kate Jessep agreed that councils need a bit more than 30 days and they have brought it to the attention of the Planning Department. Perhaps as it gets closer to the submission date there could be a briefing for the council?

Action: Neoen will think about how they can assist Councils ahead of the formal submission process. Neoen will liaise directly with Councils.

Kate Jessep asked Umwelt whether their work investigates the impacts of the roads being upgraded and widened and the effect of biodiversity values. Bill explained that those impacts are part of their work and will be assessed.

Kate Jessep asked Umwelt about whether firefighting is addressed in the Social Impact Assessment. Sarah said it has been brought to their attention that firefighting is a concern for the community and the social impacts of this will be considered in the SIA.

Neoen is addressing some fire fighting concerns during the webinars being held this week (Thursday evening and Saturday afternoon). They will have an aviation specialist to provide information and answer questions live.

Kate Jessep asked if Community Benefits Fund can be channelled into larger long-term projects at some point, not just small grants. Neoen explained that they are already thinking about this, and the challenge is around the administration of several projects' funds. Neoen is starting to have their Community Benefit Funds run through a type of Trust that administers funds. There may be a possibility of other projects in the area doing a similar thing so that the administration of several projects' community funds could be used together.

Umwelt stated that the SIA will consider feedback from the community on what is important to them and projects they would like to see funded.

Sam Lobsey asked if Bendemeer is part of the SIA as they are a town that is close to the project as well. Umwelt confirmed that it is included. Anne-Marie Ward explained that as part of her Community Engagement role, Bendemeer has been included in postal drops, flyers in public spaces etc. including posters to Walcha, Bendemeer, Kentucky, Uralla community noticeboards as well as newsletter and booklet mailouts to Bendemeer and Walcha Post runs (that go to Kentucky & Bendemeer areas).

Natasha Ledger asked about tourism opportunities, aircraft changes and impacts on the EIP and if there have been any negotiations with the Rural Fire Service (RFS) (e.g. 24-hour monitoring, travel distance, new technology they would need, if a turbine blows up, oil spills, who pays for anything they may need if anything happens).

Umwelt confirmed that impacts to tourism will be considered the SIA.

There was some confusion around what changes are proposed for the airport so Natasha will find where she had read the information and follow it up with Joanna at a later date.

The consultation with the RFS is part of the study. Joanna will take this on notice.

Sarah reiterated that regarding possible fires, Public Safety & Public Health will be considered as part of the SIA, other assessments look at the technical aspects and the SIA looks at the social impacts.

Action: Neoen will provide further information on the RFS consultation.

The CCC thanked Neoen and Umwelt for their consultation and information today.

Natasha asked if there are any breeding programs for birds if there are any impacted by the project. Bill Wallach from Umwelt explained that there is a credit calculator for eco-system and species impacts. The credits that are accumulated in the studies being done by Umwelt determine the off-set liability for the project. The credits then become a development consent for the project. Mitigation measures will be considered as the project moves forward. These reports are part of the EIS.

9	Issues for future meetings	Chair
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The Chair asked if there were any other updates members would like at the next meeting.

Neoen will ask for someone from their connections team to present information about the transmission grid.

The Chair invited members to email if they have any other ideas or issues.

The type of lights being used at the tops of towers was questioned. This is currently part of the aviation survey, and Neoen should have some more information on it soon. The project is quite a long way from the airport though and it is unusual for the aviation experts to recommend lights when turbines are far from airports.

Action: Neoen to provide follow-up information regarding whether lights will be recommended for turbines.

10	General business	Chair
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The next meeting is set for February 2022; the Chair asked how this schedule fits with the project submission date.

It was noted that Umwelt will be still completing surveys after the submission date. This is because the majority of the surveys are included in the submission, but some are ongoing. Umwelt will continue with those. The Community Consultation is also on-going.

Once the submission goes in the department will check it for adequacy. There were concerns discussed around the submission date and timelines not being around holiday time for public exhibition. Neoen is working with the department around timelines and trying to make sure it is suitable (i.e. not holiday time).

Sam Lobsey asked whether there is a possibility of having a site tour of the project area (either as a CCC and/or the Council). Neoen will investigate the possibility of this.

Action: Neoen will investigate the possibility of having a site visit of the project area.

There was some information earlier around decommissioning. A follow-up question was asked around covering the turbine concrete base and how future owners would know it is there. Could it be entered on titles of land? Tamworth Council has recommended this in another project. Neoen would be fine with this.

11	Next meeting(s) 10 February 2022		Chair
12	Meeting Closed	5:40pm	Chair

Actions from this meeting:

- Check James Croft is in the register correctly.
- Neoen will provide CCC members with a link to the NSW Government for further report information.
- Neoen will think about how they can assist Councils ahead of the formal submission process. Neoen will liaise directly with Councils.
- Neoen will provide further information on the RFS consultation.
- Neoen to provide follow-up information regarding whether lights will be recommended for turbines.
- Neoen will investigate the possibility of having a site visit of the project area.