

THUNDERBOLT ENERGY HUB WIND FARM CCC

AGENDA - COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MEETING 3

MONDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2022

2:00PM – 5:00PM

LOCATION

ON-LINE

Chair:	Dr W.E.J. Paradise AM
Members	
Community:	Wayne Ames; Angus Carter; James Croft; Chris Page; Phillip Roberts
Councils:	Clr Eric Noakes; Clr Sarah Burrows; Sam Lobsey
Neoen:	Joanna Murphy, Garth Heron, Matthew Parton
Guest Presenter:	Mike Young, Executive Director, Planning & Communities Energy Corporation of NSW
Minute taker:	Anne-Marie Ward

Agenda item	Responsibility	Time
1 Welcome and Introductions	Chair	

The Chair welcomed all members and thanked presenters for their attendance. Today we have Garth Heron – Neoen Head of Development and Matthew Parton – State Leader, NSW Development. The Chair also welcomed Mike Young, Executive Director of Planning & Communities for the Energy Corporation of NSW.

2 Apologies	Chair	
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No apologies. All members in attendance. Anne-Marie Ward had difficulty logging in but managed to be online by 2:10pm. Angus Carter logged in at 2:30pm, Clr Eric Noakes arrived at 3:30pm and Clr Sarah Burrows had to leave at 3:45pm.

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. 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 per the process decided at the first meeting of the CCC. They are available on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website.

5	Presentation: REZ Process	DPIE
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Mike Young, Executive Director of Planning & Communities for the Energy Corporation of NSW presented information about the NSW Renewable Energy Zones.

EnergyCo is not the Department of Planning. EnergyCo NSW acts as the Infrastructure Planner for NSW REZs and coordinates whole-of-REZ strategic planning and delivery.

Renewable Energy Zones have been identified by the NSW government as the need to transform NSW energy systems has become apparent. Our current infrastructure took 30 years to plan and build – we need to replace it in less than 15 years. The reality is, as we saw over the weekend, these coal-fired power stations which have been the base of all our electricity for many, many years and still support approximately 75-80% of NSW's baseload energy, are being progressively phased out. Mike provided several examples of coal-fired power stations which are closing earlier than expected. It was noted that the coal-fired power stations will require alternative sources of energy to replace them and we need to do it quicker than we ever thought.

A Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) is an identified area where there is likely to be high renewable energy generation connecting into either existing or new energy transmission.

Private developers and investors build generation and storage projects, while benefitting from greater commercial certainty through the REZ access scheme and Long-Term Energy Service Agreements (LTESAs). Network providers develop the network transmission infrastructure with support from the Infrastructure Planner (EnergyCo NSW) in line with the National Electricity Rules (known as the Transmission Efficiency Test).

The REZ provides some incentives as well as some obligations to the renewable energy industry to build and operate these projects within the REZs.

There are currently three REZs identified in NSW, with two more Indicative REZs. The New England REZ (NE-REZ) has been officially declared under legislation in December 2021.

EnergyCo will also implement a network access scheme for generators, coordinate community engagement and benefit sharing and promote local development and employment opportunities in the REZ. EnergyCo understands that Neoen and other proponents are proposing community benefit sharing programs for the local communities surrounding their projects. EnergyCo will look at broader benefit sharing opportunities utilising the fees paid by proponents in order to connect to REZ network assets.

Mike explained the locations and timing of the committed and anticipated development of transmission infrastructure. The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) is a Commonwealth agency and have published a plan for transmission lines. They have identified that at least two major new transmission lines are planned in the New England region, the first to be delivered by around 2027. EnergyCo has begun initial concept designs which consider different network configurations across the New England REZ Infrastructure, including potential substation locations. The next steps include further technical modelling to assess benefits of all options, land use, environmental and social licence considerations, investigation of government owned land and targeted consultation strategy to ensure understanding of community views and help refine a study corridor.

EnergyCo NSW's work does not change the planning process for developers of State Significant Development (SSD) projects. Proponents must still follow the proper SSD planning process under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A 1979).

The Chair asked Mike to confirm how EnergyCo and TransGrid will work in future. Mike: TransGrid will continue to build transmission lines as needed; however where a REZ has been declared EnergyCo will develop new transmission infrastructure in that area. TransGrid may still end up building the transmission line in those areas as well; but the NSW government will be responsible for designing and building those assets to support the Renewable Energy Zones.

Sam Lobsey asked what considerations were made in identifying the boundaries of REZ? Were environmental issues taken into consideration as well as how much wind is generated?

When the REZ was identified, there were not just lines drawn on a map, there was a process that informed the design – there were many GIS layers that were used to inform the boundaries and the location, from wind/solar/hydro resource mapping to understanding where the high value agricultural land, national parks, world heritage areas are situated and where existing transmission lines are located, among many other considerations. It is an indicative area and all proponents and EnergyCo still must look at the local area as part of any development that is being proposed.

Sam Lobsey asked if the 5 REZs will cover the loss of the coal-generated electricity? The NSW Government is looking at long-term agreements to guarantee certain amounts of electricity provision. Based on modelling, we will need approximately 12GW of generation and 2GW of storage in the next 8 to 10 years. The registrations of interest in the industry will more than meet that number. Renewable energy projects can be developed outside of the REZ areas as well.

Wayne Ames asked for elaboration on the fees that EnergyCo NSW will collect from the Thunderbolt Energy Hub – will that be spent in our project area, or does it go back to state revenue?

Mike asked Neoen to clarify this as they may or may not be subject to fees, depending on where Neoen will connect its proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub project to the transmission network. Joanna Murphy confirmed that the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project is not proposing to connect to new transmission infrastructure, but that it plans to connect to the existing 330kV transmission line which traverses the Stage 1 project area. Whether Neoen will need to pay access fees or will have access rights when connecting to this line is not yet determined.

Mike: Connection fees are yet to be determined; this should be finalised toward the end of 2022. At this stage, the intention is that the fees will have to be used within the REZ, not necessarily within 5km of the project area. The idea is to collect the fees and set up a committee involving local councils, groups and individuals to determine how the fees will be used and distributed to the community. EnergyCo is aware that members of the community are concerned about money going into consolidated revenue at the state level, consolidated revenue at the Council level and/or the money not being used in the local area.

Wayne Ames asked if there will be a sense of urgency to get projects like the Thunderbolt Energy Hub up and running quickly following recent announcements the coal-fired power stations are closing earlier than expected?

Origin's recent announcement that they are closing a coal-fired power station in 3 years is 7 years earlier than originally planned. If there are more of these early closures this means that the Government must ensure that enough electricity being generated in the REZs earlier. There are many projects that are under way, not just Thunderbolt Energy Hub. The New England REZ is forecast to include approximately 8GW of energy generation in the New England REZ; however EnergyCo received interest from proponents for a total of around 27GW of interest within this REZ.

James Croft asked whether the Tamworth sub-station upgrade means anything for the REZ or the Thunderbolt Energy Hub.

The existing transmission lines are not sufficient to deliver all the electricity that will be generated from the projects within the New England REZ so we will need to build new substations in the future.

Matt Parton confirmed that the Tamworth substation upgrade is part of the Qld NSW Interconnector (QNI) upgrade which is to allow more power to flow from Qld to NSW. There are several substations involved in this upgrade. This is very small compared to the plans EnergyCo has to upgrade infrastructure in the REZ. There is however sufficient capacity in the existing transmission lines to allow Thunderbolt Energy Hub Stage 1 to connect.

The Chair thanked Mike Young for his time and the information provided. We have had some questions raised in the past about the current transmission line capacity given all the electricity to be generated from the proposed renewable projects in the area. The information provided today has helped to answer those questions.

Action: Mike Young will provide his details to the group if there are any further questions.

Joanna Murphy provided answers to the questions asked at the previous meeting.

Question 1: Please provide a link to the NSW Government's plan to underwrite renewable energy projects.

Information on the AEMO Service Ltd as the NSW Consumer Trustee can be found here:

<https://aemo.com.au/about/aemo-services/aemo-services-as-the-consumer-trustee>

Information on Renewable Energy Zones is available here:

<https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/renewables/renewable-energy-zones>

Question 2: Will lights be required on top of wind turbines?

The aviation impact assessment determined that obstacle lighting would not be required on top of wind turbines. Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) may recommend lighting.

Question 3: Is it possible for Councils and/or CCC members to undertake a site visit of the project area?

Yes, this is possible subject to permission being granted by the host landholders.

Question 4: What was the outcome of consultation with RFS?

Aviation Projects consulted with RFS on behalf of Neoen as part of the aviation assessment. The response received from RFS was: *"The NSW RFS has no further comments on the Thunderbolt Wind Farm. Wind Farms are treated like any other potential hazard to aircraft operations. Aerial firefighting strategies and tactics will be selected based on the fire location, what the fire is threatening and hazard in the area."*

A project overview was provided for the benefit of new members.

The project proposes one access point directly from the New England Highway into the host landholder's property. This means that large vehicles transporting wind turbine components would turn directly from the New England Hwy into the project site and not need to utilize smaller local roads.

Project Update - Stage 1

A copy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), submitted as part of the Development Application, will be available on USBs for Councils and for community members.

The distance to the Kentucky Village from the closest wind turbine on Stage 1 is approximately 10.5km. The distance to the Kentucky South from the closest wind turbine on Stage 1 is approximately 11km.

The distance to the Kentucky Village from the closest wind turbine on Stage 2 (based on scoping stage layout) is approximately 6.4km. The distance to Kentucky South from the closest wind turbine on Stage 2 (based on scoping stage layout) is approximately 5.2km. If Stage 2 proceeds, the layout will be refined.

Next Steps

The community will be notified once the Development Application is on public exhibition. A newsletter will be distributed in the local community. Following the public exhibition, Neoen and subject matter experts will respond to the submission received, in what is known as the "Response to Submissions" phase. Depending on how many submissions are received in objection to the project, the project may be referred to the Independent Planning Commission (IPC). Neoen expects the approvals process will take between 12 and 18 months. Community consultation will be ongoing throughout this process.

Joanna provided detailed assessment findings slides on visual, noise, traffic, aviation & biodiversity. Photomontages are available to view on the website <https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/>

James Croft asked about the neighbour payments, landholder payments and community benefits and whether they would be indexed over time.

Matthew Parton explained that indexing is a complicated process and sometimes not very transparent way of working out payments every year. Neoen wanted the neighbour payments to be easy to understand, fair and transparent and indexing payments would complicate this. Rather than starting with a smaller amount

and indexing the payment over the operations phase of the project, Neoen decided to offer a higher payment from the start of the operations phase and keep this constant every year.

Action: Neoen will provide some modelling on what the community benefits would look like in the future, including analysis of the indexed versus non-indexed neighbour payments.

Eric Noakes had joined the meeting and asked what happens with the Community Benefit Fund and how it is administered. Neoen confirmed that it is \$100,000 per year for Stage 1, administered throughout the operations phase of the project. Neoen will likely administer the Community Benefit Fund through a not-for-profit foundation in line with Neoen's approach across its portfolio. The Community Benefits Fund will run a competitive annual grant process, with funds allocated to community-building initiatives proposed by local non-profit organisations with a priority given to those in close proximity to the project. A Terms of Reference for the fund will be established and this will set out the criteria – Neoen welcomes input from the local Councils and communities on what kinds of projects should be eligible for funding. Decision-making will rest with an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from Council, Neoen and the local community who will review and evaluate community grant applications. Individuals, businesses and local government will not be eligible for grants from the Community Benefit Fund.

Chris Page asked for clarification that Stage 1 Community Benefits is \$100 000 and there would be an additional amount for Stage 2. Neoen confirmed that this is the case.

Sarah Burrows asked what happens with the Council roads. If there is any damage to them in the construction what happens? Would the Council be re-numerated for the damage the trucks do to shire roads?

Action: Neoen will liaise with Councils before the next meeting and provide a response at the next meeting.

Sarah Burrows asked if there needs to be lights installed on the wind turbines and if so whether they can be radar activated lights? Some discussion ensued about whether lights would be a requirement or a recommendation only and what that would mean for the project. It is noted that there is some community concern about lighting and radar activated lights would be preferred. Garth Heron explained different sorts of light options, where lights can be installed only on some turbines for example. It is rarely a condition of consent, but Joanna will investigate it further and bring some more information back to the next meeting. It would be good if feedback during the public exhibition phase. The community do not wish to have lights on turbines.

Action: Neoen will provide further information on lighting – requirements and the sorts of lighting that can be used, other projects that don't have lighting in NSW, conditions for consent.

Neoen confirmed that a newsletter will be sent to all stakeholders soon, including information about the EIS and upcoming public exhibition.

7	Business Arising	Neoen
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The Chair sought clarification about whether Neoen had liaised with Councils ahead of submitting the EIS. Neoen confirmed that presentations were made to both Uralla and Tamworth Councils last week.

8	Questions and clarification	Chair
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No further questions were asked.

9	Issues for future meetings	Chair
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The Chair asked if there were any issues members would like to add to the agenda for the next meeting.

No further issues were raised.

The Chair requested members to email any agenda items that they think of directly to him.

10	General business	Chair
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Sam Lobsey raised the Site Inspection as proposed for a future meeting and coinciding with the public exhibition. Some discussion ensued regarding dates and times. Neoen is currently waiting for the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to get back to them with information on when the public exhibition can commence.

It was decided that a site visit could be combined with the next meeting.

11	Next meeting(s)
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The meeting date of Thursday 24th March was suggested.

The next meeting will be a face-to-face meeting to be held after a site tour.

Action: Neoen will send out some suggested dates via email. Anne-Marie Ward will organize a meeting venue once a date is finalized.

12	Meeting closed	4:00pm	Chair
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Actions from this meeting:

1. Mike Young will provide his details to the group if there are any further questions.
2. Neoen will provide some modelling on what the community benefits would look like in the future.
3. Neoen will liaise with councils on traffic and local road impacts before the next meeting and provide a response at the next meeting.
4. Neoen will provide further information on lighting – requirements and the sorts of lighting that can be used, other projects that don't have lighting in NSW, conditions for consent.
5. Neoen will send out some suggested dates via email for the next CCC meeting and site visit. Anne-Marie Ward will organize a meeting venue once a date is finalized.