

**THUNDERBOLT ENERGY HUB WIND FARM  
COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE  
MEETING 7**

**MONDAY 8 MAY 2023  
5:00PM – 6:30PM**

**LOCATION  
Uralla Neighbourhood Centre  
Centre**

Chair:	Dr W.E.J. Paradice 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; Emily Walker, Ani Deshpande
Guest Speaker:	-
Minute taker:	Anne-Marie Ward

<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
1 Welcome and Introductions	Chair

The Chair welcomed all Committee members and Emily Walker (State Lead – NSW Development) and Ani Deshpande (Project Manager) from Neoen. Sam Lobsey has joined via zoom for today's meeting.

The Chair discussed possible changes to CCCs in future – it looks like CCCs will be required to be developed only post-approval, not pre-approval as ours has been.

2 Apologies	Chair
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Wayne Ames, Eric Noakes and Phillip Roberts were apologies.

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 discussed at the first meeting.

Joanna Murphy went through the business arising from the previous minutes, which included nine actions. The responses to these actions are listed below and are also provided in the presentation document.

**Meeting 6 Action 1: Neoen to provide information as to whether discount electricity for the community is an option of the Community Benefit Fund.**

Neoen does not sell power directly to household consumers, therefore the cost of power to the community will not be directly reduced due to the construction of this project, but the project will contribute to the overall reduction in consumer's power bills thanks to the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The Project has the ability to provide affordable, reliable and low-cost electricity to NSW consumers. It can do this because the energy input (wind and sun) for renewable generators is free, hence a wind or solar farm is able to offer electricity prices that are competitive with the traditional generators like coal and gas.

Neoen typically sells a large portion of the generated electricity to customers via a contract called a power purchase agreement. This customer may be a company (like a factory or a mine with high energy needs) or an electricity retailer who then on-sells the electricity to residential customers like you or I.

The community benefit fund is not intended to benefit individuals or companies, but the community as a whole, i.e., community groups, schools and community organisations. Therefore, the Community Benefit Fund will not provide direct discounted electricity for individuals.

If lower electricity prices are a key concern, then another option may be for an NGO to be established who could apply to the Community Benefit Fund for a grant to provide energy bill relief for low-income households or those struggling to pay their electricity bills.

A question was asked about whether there would be a way to assist the local retirement village, McMaugh Gardens Uralla, with electricity costs. The response was that Neoen could likely not assist directly with alleviating electricity costs, but that the retirement village could be eligible to apply for a grant from the Community Benefit Fund.

A question was asked about whether the community could form a group and buy electricity in the same way a mine or factory does? Is there a threshold?

**ACTION 1:** Neoen to investigate if it is possible for the community to form a group to buy electricity.

There was some discussion about the marginal loss factor of projects in general. EnergyCo is looking at solutions to energy loss to mitigate these problems in future e.g., batteries going in to where coal-fuelled power stations are currently being closed.

**Meeting 6 Action 2: Neoen to provide clarification regarding what happens if there are funds left over in the Community Benefit Fund and whether they will be rolled over from one year to the next.**

Yes, remaining funds will be rolled over from one year to the next if it isn't fully used.

**Meeting 6 Action 3: Neoen to provide a list of the ideas that have been suggested by community members for the Community Benefit Fund so far.**

Neoen summarised the community feedback in the Community Relations Plan, which will be submitted together with the Response to Submissions (RTS) report. These are detailed in the attached slides.

Some of the responses received from people who selected 'Suggestion (please specify)' include:

- Local electric car fast charging stations
- Not to allow local Council to administer the Community Benefit Fund
- Community Future Fund

- Ambulance station for improved outcomes for the community
- Sponsorship of the local show
- Profit sharing in wind turbines that impact neighbours
- Telecommunications improvement, including improved mobile phone signal and internet coverage
- Funding for Kentucky Hall, School and fire brigade
- RFS training on roads within wind farm
- Educational scholarships, traineeships, cadetships, trade skills
- Making the wind farm partially community-owned
- Indoor sports centre
- Energy efficiency program and support for low income households
- Help local shires to prosper

During the one-on-one meetings, the most common idea that community members had in relation to the Community Benefit Fund was that they would like to see improved telecommunications in the area (mobile and internet reception) as they perceived it to be poor at present.

Other ideas suggested include:

- providing cheaper power
- a viewing platform for the wind farm
- funding for local community groups such as the Kentucky Hall, School, RFS and Progress Association to make Kentucky more appealing
- create more recreational areas such as camping grounds
- a community centre where programs are held all the time, such as pottery and crafts
- a community sports centre
- a swimming pool/tennis court/cricket pitch
- tree corridors near turbine roads and next to the solar farm to prevent erosion and screen view of the solar farm
- potable water trucks for times of drought
- lights at railway crossing in Kentucky village
- wildlife conservation

A question was asked about how Neoen can improve telecommunications. A statement was made about how 3g is going soon so our telecommunications are about to get worse due to the patchy reception we currently have.

**ACTION 2:** Neoen to provide information on other communities/projects where they may have advocated successfully to improve telecommunications.

***Meeting 6 Action 4: If community members have any further questions regarding de-commissioning and rehabilitation, please email these to Joanna Murphy so she can provide further details at the next CCC meeting.***

NSW Department of Planning is currently updating the 2016 NSW Wind Energy Guideline, which we expect will include some guidance around decommissioning. It is expected to be released in August for consultation.

Decommissioning and rehabilitation requirements are also usually outlined in the conditions of project DAs.

***Meeting 6 Action 5: The Chair to write to State Planning regarding decommissioning and rehabilitation practices and processes.***

The Chair apologised for not completing this action. This will be done this week. Members should email the Chair or Joanna Murphy if they have any further questions to add.

***Meeting 6 Action 6: Joanna Murphy to email members a link to the Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme published by EnergyCo.***

<https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/strategic-benefit-payments-scheme>

**Meeting 6 Action 7: Neoen will provide more detail around the connection process at a future meeting.**

A high-level overview of the connection process can be found on TransGrid's website:

<https://www.transgrid.com.au/about-us/network/networkconnections>

A visual is provided in the attached slides. This prompted a question about a battery that recently caught fire in South Australia at the Victorian Big Battery. What is being released into the air – fire fighting / the actual burning?

**ACTION 3:** Neoen to share the report from the fire at the Victorian Big Battery.

A question was asked about how solar / batteries / turbines/ roads change the local weather? Does it change how much rain the area gets (less trees = less rain)? Are there any microclimate changes? There is concern for the cumulative impact – we have a lot of projects being proposed in the area.

**ACTION 4:** Neoen to investigate and share any research into microclimate changes, cumulative impact as per the questions asked.

**Meeting 6 Action 8: Joanna Murphy will send links to the wind turbine manufacturer websites for member information.**

- Vestas: <https://www.vestas.com/en>
- GE: <https://www.ge.com/renewableenergy/wind-energy>
- Nordex: <https://www.nordex-online.com/en/>
- Goldwind: <https://www.goldwindaustralia.com/>
- Siemens Gamesa: <https://www.siemensgamesa.com/en-int>

For context, the wind turbines used at Neoen projects in Australia that are under construction or in operation:

- Hornsdale Wind Farm: Siemens
- Bulgana Wind Farm: Siemens Gamesa
- Kaban Wind Farm: Vestas
- Goyder: GE

A manufacturer has not been decided for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub yet.

**Meeting 6 Action 9: Neoen will provide information on what options are available to make official complaints.**

The options to make complaints are:

Contact Neoen to discuss the complaint. You may contact us via phone (1800 966 207), email ([contact@thunderboltenergyhub.com.au](mailto:contact@thunderboltenergyhub.com.au)) or mail (GPO BOX 1950, Canberra ACT 2601).

The Thunderbolt Energy Hub website outlines the six-step process of how we handle complaints (<https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/make-a-complaint/>)

Contact Uralla Shire Council (<https://www.uralla.nsw.gov.au/Home>) or Tamworth Regional Council (<https://www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au/>)

Contact the National Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (<https://www.aeic.gov.au/>)

**Neoen provided a project update on planning:**

Neoen plans to submit a Response to Submission (RTS) within the next month. NSW DPE will then undertake its assessment of the EIS. The project will be referred to the NSW IPC following NSW DPE's assessment. We expect the DA decision by the end of 2023.

**Neoen provided project updates in relation to design:**

Neoen are proposing a potential water source for construction, which will be included in the RTS report. This will involve the use of water from the neighbouring dam for construction needs, e.g., dust suppression. Water would be stored in an on-site reservoir that would only be required throughout construction, approx. 2 years. This will be subject to licensing; therefore other ideas may be explored as well.

This prompted a question regarding where water would come from. High quality water for concrete is difficult to give a definitive answer to because it will depend on the provider for the project and that has not been decided yet.

**Neoen provided a project update on the detailed assessments:**

- *Aboriginal Heritage*: test excavations undertaken in 2022 across 4 locations.
- *Aviation Assessment*: in line with CASA's requirement a lighting plan has been prepared, outlining which wind turbines may require lighting. The aviation assessment found that lighting is not required. The final decision will be made as part of the assessment of the DA.
- *Biodiversity*: a number of further surveys have occurred throughout 2022 and 2023, some of which are for the RTS in response to BCS' submission. Other bird and bat surveys are being undertaken for the Bird and Bat Adaptive Management Plan (BBAMP), which will be required for the project prior to construction commencing. An updated report will be submitted with the RTS.
- *Community Relations Plan*: an updated report will be submitted with the RTS.
- *Traffic*: TfNSW required some clarification on access road from New England Hwy to site, which will be provided in the RTS.
- *Visual*: two additional photomontages from near-by residences have been created and will be submitted to DPE for assessment.

This prompted a question regarding biodiversity – what kind of bat or bird deterrents can be used?

**ACTION 5:** Neoen to investigate sound deterrent examples for the next meeting.

**Neoen provided a project update on Community Benefit Sharing:**

Neoen has proposed a community benefit sharing program for the project. The program is comprised of two components:

- Community Benefit Sharing Fund = initially committed \$100,000 per year throughout the operations phase
- Neighbour Benefit Fund = approx. \$220,000 per year throughout the operations phase

Neoen's principle is that community funds should be shared with the community closest to the project. Neoen have been negotiating with Uralla and Tamworth Councils regarding how they would like the community benefit sharing schemes in their areas to be administered, either through a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) or a Community Benefit Fund (CBF).

Neoen have agreed to increase the sum of the CBF to \$160,000 p.a. indexed to CPI in line with Uralla Shire Council's request for the community contribution fee to be approximately 1.5% of build cost.

\$160,000 p.a. represents approximately 1.88% of the project's build cost. With the \$220,000 neighbour payment, this represents 3.65% of the project build cost.

Neoen proposed to share benefits with both Councils equally, i.e. \$80,000 each. Tamworth Regional Council agreed to their portion being administered as a CBF, while Uralla Shire Council chose a VPA.

This prompted a discussion around the Uralla Shire Council choosing a VPA. The members are adamant that there must be strict rules around the funding so that the council can't just spend it how they like as it is funding for the community.

**ACTION 5:** Neoen and the Chair to provide ideas from other areas e.g., Singleton, Muswellbrook where funds/projects/VPAs have been in existence for some time.

7	Questions and clarification	Chair
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Members asked for clarification from Neoen around the Neighbour Benefit Fund not being indexed, but the Community Benefit Fund will be indexed. This is correct.

Members asked for reassurance that the CBF won't be used for council areas outside of the project area. The Terms of Reference for the CBF would have distance from the project as a criteria so that it would benefit the local community.

8	Issues for future meetings	Chair
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There was some discussion regarding when the next meeting should be. It was agreed that it should be in the next 4-6 months, depending on when the IPC is held. Agenda items can be emailed to the Chair.

9	General Business	Chair
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Covered under other agenda items.

10	Next Meeting (s)	Chair
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A meeting date will be proposed once the department has made a recommendation regarding the project. The Chair will make a decision on a final date via email with members.

11	Meeting close	7:10pm
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***Actions from this meeting:***

**ACTION 1:** Neoen to investigate if it is possible for the community to form a group to buy electricity.

**ACTION 2:** Neoen to provide information on other communities/projects where they have advocated successfully to improve telecommunications.

**ACTION 3:** Neoen to share the report from the fire at the Victorian Big Battery.

**ACTION 4:** Neoen to investigate and share any research into microclimate changes, cumulative impact as per the questions asked.

**ACTION 5:** Neoen to investigate sound deterrent examples for the next meeting.

**ACTION 5:** Neoen and the Chair to provide ideas from other areas e.g., Singleton, Muswellbrook where funds/projects/VPAs have been in existence for some time.