

VNI West Project Community Reference Group

Terms of Reference

Introduction

Purpose

This document is a Terms of Reference for the Community Reference Group (CRG) for the VNI West Project in Victoria. It outlines the CRG's role, scope, membership and meeting arrangements.

Background

VNI West is a proposed new high capacity 500 kV double-circuit overhead transmission line, which will deliver vital new transmission infrastructure to:

- Carry clean, low-cost renewable power from renewable energy zones (REZs) in New South Wales and Victoria, in particular the wind and solar-rich regions of the Murray River REZ and the Western Victorian REZ.
- Strengthen the connection between Victoria's and New South Wales' power grids, including access to renewable energy from the Snowy 2.0 hydro scheme.
- Improve security and reliability in the electricity network as coal-fired power stations retire.

The success of any major transmission project is dependent not just on its technical design and delivery, but also on how effectively it engages with and addresses the concerns of the communities it affects.

The CRG for the VNI West Project will be one engagement mechanism to provide communities with an opportunity to work collaboratively on the project.

The CRG, together with Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) will develop a shared understanding about the project, including discussing community concerns and opportunities to address potential impacts.

Transmission Company Victoria (TCV)

TCV is a new company created by AEMO Victorian Planning to progress the VNI West transmission project following the completion of the regulatory investment test for transmission or RIT-T and the publication of the final report, the Project Assessment Conclusions Report.

As AEMO is the system planner, and will not physically construct or own the transmission lines, it established TCV to make sure that commitments made in the early stages are captured and honoured across the life of the project.

TCV will work with the community on the development of this important transmission line, including managing the CRG.

Our commitment

TCV values the commitment made by CRG members to work with the project team to provide important feedback and insights on local values and issues.

We commit to making all efforts to create a safe and productive environment for participants to engage with TCV, and to acting with honesty and integrity throughout its engagement.

We will:

- Clearly communicate the role and purpose of the CRG.
- Engage transparently with the CRG.
- Provide an update on questions within three weeks of being raised in a CRG meeting.
- Provide a clear explanation why we cannot answer any questions where those situations arise.
- Genuinely consider the feedback and insights provided by the CRG.
- Provide timely updates to the CRG.
- Demonstrate how feedback from the CRG has been considered.
- Treat all CRG members with respect.

The Community Reference Group

Scope

The CRG for the VNI West Project will aim to:

- Increase community understanding about the VNI West Project, processes, and key milestones.
- Enable two-way conversations between TCV and the affected community and stakeholders.
- Provide a transparent forum to discuss issues of community interest related to the VNI West Project.
- Capture community feedback and suggestions to assist with project decision making.
- Provide a forum for community input into regional benefit sharing opportunities.
- Allow an avenue of feedback to communities, on how community suggestions around the project have been considered or actioned.

Out of scope

The following is out of scope of the CRG. The CRG is not:

- A decision-making forum or a community regulator for the VNI West Project.
- The only form of community engagement that will be conducted in relation to the VNI West Project.

- A collective of representatives from community bodies or organisations.
- A collective of individuals who support or are against the VNI West Project.

Membership

The CRG membership will consist of up to **20 local community representatives**, with representation across the local government areas (LGAs) within the VNI West Project footprint. This includes Northern Grampians, Buloke, Gannawarra, and Loddon.

TCV will seek to form a diverse CRG that is representative of the population of the areas affected by the project.

Member requirements

Community representatives will be:

- Current residents and/or landholders in the VNI West project area, or a member of a community or stakeholder group with an interest in the project.
- Able to demonstrate involvement in local community groups and/or activities.
- Able to represent and communicate the interests of the local community in the project area.
- Willing to adhere to these CRG terms of reference and Code of Conduct.
- Able to commit to a membership period of at least one year and attend all meetings where possible.

Member roles

Each CRG member will be asked to:

- Collect and share feedback on community sentiment, issues, concerns, and options to reduce impacts in relation to the VNI West Project.
- Provide feedback on the effectiveness of TCV's community engagement plans and activities.
- Consider sharing information with their communities about the project where appropriate.

Member remuneration

Up to \$1500 remuneration is available to cover CRG travel costs and time commitment per year. Members can apply for remuneration through the CRG Chairperson.

Time commitment

It is expected the CRG will commence in September 2023 and continue for several years as the project progresses. Meetings are to be held every approximately every two months. It is expected that members are able to commit to a minimum of 12 months. Meetings may be held more frequently depending on project status, and needs identified by the CRG.

Membership on the CRG may be cancelled at the Chairperson's discretion due to non-attendance. Further information on the role of the Chairperson is set out below.

Working groups

The CRG may form sub-committees or working groups to address a particular area of interest if required. For example, this may occur to address requirements specific to geographic areas, to explore a particular topic or local opportunities for community benefits.

Vacancies

If a position becomes vacant a new member may be appointed through a public expression of interest process or selected from the pool of prior applications.

Resourcing and additional attendees

Chairperson

A facilitator who is contracted by TCV will act as the independent Chairperson for the CRG. While the position will be engaged by TCV, the Chairperson is required to act with independence from TCV and any TCV sub-contractor. The Chairperson will:

- Prepare meeting agendas with the support of the Secretariat and with input from TCV and the CRG.
- Facilitate group discussion and participation fairly.
- Approve the draft minutes for distribution to the CRG.
- Monitor and progress action register to ensure concerns, questions and opportunities are pursued and resolved in a timely manner.
- Make final determination whether items on action register have been resolved, in consultation with CRG.
- Invite external parties to the meetings to observe, address or present to the CRG.
- Attend all meetings or delegate the role to an independent facilitator if unable to attend.
- Ensure compliance with these CRG terms of reference and Code of Conduct and manage conflict resolution if required.
- Ensure review and refinement of CRG performance and arrangements.

Secretariat

A representative contracted by TCV will act as the independent Secretariat for the CRG. The Secretariat will:

- Prepare meeting agendas in collaboration with the Chairperson.
- Attend all meetings or delegate the role to an independent consultant if unable to attend.

- Prepare draft minutes for the review of the Chairperson prior to circulation to the CRG and other attendees.
- Circulate meeting invites at least two weeks prior to each meeting.
- Note new concerns, questions and/or opportunities that should be considered through the action register.
- Update the action register when items are deemed to be resolved.
- Circulate agendas and any other relevant documents at least a week prior to each meeting.
- Circulate meeting minutes within two weeks of a meeting.
- Support review and refinement of CRG performance and arrangements.

Other attendance

As needed, other stakeholders, technical experts and representatives will be invited to attend the CRG as observers or to provide support to the CRG process. This may include:

- TCV representatives including their engaged technical consultants.
- Council officers representing each of the four LGAs.
- Invitees of the Chairperson as required to support the CRG process.
- The Chairperson will notify CRG members of other attendance at least two weeks prior to the CRG meeting.
- Any objections to other attendees will be considered by the CRG Chairperson, and a final decision on attendance will be made by the Chairperson.

Meetings

Meetings will be:

- Held on a weekday at a time suitable to a majority of the CRG members.
- Held every two months or at a frequency agreed by the CRG.
- Closed and not open to the public.
- Generally run for 90 minutes (unless longer sessions are required).
- Require that a minimum of eight CRG members are present for the meeting to proceed.
- Be face to face in one of the impacted local government areas. Online meetings may be scheduled in exceptional circumstances.

Meeting Minutes

- CRG meeting minutes will be circulated by the CRG secretariat to CRG members and observers within two weeks of a CRG meeting.
- Attendees can note any suggested revisions to these minutes to the CRG Chairperson.
- Meeting minutes will be considered for endorsement – including any agreed changes – at the next CRG meeting.
- Endorsed meeting minutes will be available publicly on the TCV webpage.

Code of conduct

All CRG members and guests must adhere to the following principles of conduct:

- Act with good faith, honesty, integrity and in accordance with an open and transparent process.
- Act in the best interests of their local and broader communities.
- Respect the views and opinions of other members, colleagues, visitors and other stakeholders.
- Refrain from non-constructive, threatening, intimidating or disorderly behaviour.
- Refrain from any form of conduct which may cause any reasonable person unwarranted offence or embarrassment.
- Attend all meetings, or send an apology to the Chairperson if they are unable to attend.
- Engage with the media in a way that is consistent, with the “Media and confidentiality” section of the Terms of Reference.
- Declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest (see below).
- As a courtesy, contact the Chairperson if they are contacted by the media for comment about the project or CRG. CRG members are free to engage with media organisation, as outlined in the section “Media and confidentiality” section of the Terms of Reference.

Conflict resolution

While disagreement may occur during meetings, we expect CRG members to work together in good faith with respect for diverse perspectives. In the event of escalating conflict, we will follow the following process:

- The Chair will ask members to adhere to these terms of reference and Code of Conduct.
- The Chair will request a short break to allow people to calm down.
- The Chair will suspend the meeting.

In the event that a member, TCV representative, observer or other invited attendee has acted outside the expectations of community members as outlined in these Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct or illegally, the individual may be suspended from the CRG at the discretion of the Chair.

Media and confidentiality

Media means print, radio, online, television, social media, newsletters or other medium of mass communication. Media organisation means a person or entity engaged in disseminating information to the general public through media. The following rules will guide media interactions of CRG members, TCV and anyone attending CRG meetings:

- Only TCV are authorised to speak to media organisations or make statements in the media on behalf of the project.
- TCV may reference the CRG in the media but cannot speak on behalf of the CRG.
- Individual members may disclose their CRG membership to the media and speak to media organisations, however, they cannot make statements on behalf of the CRG, TCV or the project.
- To support open and honest discussion in the meetings, comments or views shared by participants at meetings must not be publicly disclosed by TCV, CRG members or guests.

The Chairperson will draft a high-level summary of each CRG for distribution to local media outlets as an interim measure before formal Minutes are endorsed.

Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest is where a CRG member has a personal, financial, or other interest in matters being discussed or considered in a meeting. For example, a member may have a potential financial or other interest in the project for themselves, family or friends. Ownership or other interest in land impacted by the project is not a conflict of interest.

A conflict can be real, potential or one that others may perceive as an interest. A CRG member must disclose to the Chairperson any situation that may be considered a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest. The Chairperson will make the determination whether there are adequate grounds for excluding the member from any discussion regarding a specific issue.

Reviewing the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference may be reviewed annually or at the discretion of the Chairperson. Members of the CRG are welcome to request a review of the Terms of Reference.

Any proposed changes to the Terms of Reference will be discussed and made in agreement with CRG members.