



VNI West Community Reference Group

MEETING MINUTES

7 May 2024

Charlton Park Complex, Charlton

CRG members present

Andrew Borg, Barry Batters, Brad McDonald, Bryan Pedersen, Claire Grant, Colin Coates, Dan Bryce (online), Glenda Watts, Glenden Watts, Jon Whykes, Max Fehring, Rachel Lloyd, Vaughan Toose, Claire Flanagan-Smith (Chair)

Project team members present

Phil Coyne, Sam Magee, Samantha Smith and Rosanna Lacorcia (TCV)

Observers present

Nick Sondu, Wayne O'Toole and Cr. Alan Getley (Buloke Shire Council), Brent McAlister and Cr. Rob Haswell (Northern Grampians Shire Council), Jess Adler (Wimmera Southern Mallee Development), Geoff Caine (VicGrid) and Brooke Hermans (RMCG).

Apologies

Brett Hosking, Daryl Warren, John Wright, Marcia McIntyre, Miles Parry, Roger Griffiths and Geoff Rollinson (Gannawarra Shire Council), Lincoln Fitzgerald (Loddon Shire Council), Chris Sounness (Wimmera Southern Mallee Development), Amanda Coulson (AEMO).

AGENDA ITEM 1 - WELCOME AND OPEN MEETING

- Cr. Alan Getley of Buloke Shire Council opened the meeting welcoming attendees to the Buloke Shire Council area, acknowledging their time in attending the meeting and acknowledging Traditional Owners.
- The Chairperson provided an overview of the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - INTRODUCTIONS

- All CRG members, project team members and observers introduced themselves.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

- The Chair explained that there had been a request to alter the draft minutes to record an action to write a letter to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) about the membership of the Technical Reference Group (TRG) for the Environment Effects Statement (EES).
- There was a discussion regarding the inadequacy of the meeting minutes in capturing the feedback and perspectives of CRG members. Concerns were raised about the omission of detailed records when CRG members reported community sentiments. Specifically, it was noted that instances where CRG members shared that a majority of the community members they interacted with were not supportive of the project were not accurately reflected in the minutes.
- The Chair explained that she would endeavour to keep the minutes as a summary of key messages, insights and actions and would confirm these with the CRG throughout the meeting to ensure they are adequately captured.

Max Fehring moved that the February minutes with the additional action to write a letter about the TRG membership were accepted by the CRG, this was seconded by Barry Batters and the motion was endorsed with no objections.

ACTION: Action to be added to the February minutes for the Chair to write a letter to the DTP requesting that someone who understands rural communities is appointed to the TRG for the VNI West EES.

AGENDA ITEM 4 - PROJECT AND ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Sam Magee of TCV provided an update on the VNI West Project. Slides from the presentation are included in Appendix B. This included:

- A summary of recent engagement, highlighting key insights discussed with engagement participants which included:
 - The timelines and process for narrowing the draft corridor to an easement should be more clearly communicated
 - Conversations around compensation should be informed by a clear process and an estimate of a likely dollar figure
 - Community members should have the opportunity to provide input into the planning and approvals process for the project
 - Issues such as biosecurity management need to be thoroughly investigated prior to accessing private land.
- An update on the transmission license application, progress with land access agreements and field surveys.
- An overview of the Environment Effects Statement process for the project which included the following key points:

- The Victorian Minister for Planning has confirmed that TCV is required to prepare an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the VNI West project.
- The EES is a rigorous process to assess the potential impacts of a major project in Victoria, overseen by Victoria's Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).
- A Technical Reference Group (TRG) will be appointed by DTP to provide advice throughout the process. Agencies invited to participate in the TRG will include representatives from government agencies, regional authorities, municipal councils, and Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) with statutory, policy, or technical interests in the project.
- As part of the EES process, TCV will undertake a program of expert studies and assessments on a range of matters. The list of matters to be investigated and proposed studies for the EES will be developed by the DTP in consultation with TCV and the TRG.
- DTP will release a draft scoping requirements document for public comment, providing landholders and community members with the opportunity to provide feedback on the scoping requirements before they are finalised and issued by the Minister for Planning.
- TCV will arrange a meeting with the CRG to discuss and provide feedback on the draft scoping requirements.
- The project must complete the EES process and obtain relevant Victorian and Commonwealth approvals before construction can commence.

CRG Members raised views around the need for:

- Clear guidance on caveats that might be placed on land, and what this means for landholders who negotiate land access.
- Compensation values to be available.
- The project to offer greater clarity about benefits to the hosting communities.

A CRG member stated that the project should offer income for affected landholders rather than compensation.

Another CRG member raised a concern that submissions written by the community in opposition to the project are not being considered in the decisions around whether the project proceeds. Sam Magee responded that the suggestion to stop the project had been heard but has not been agreed to.

ACTION: Arrange a meeting with the CRG to discuss and provide feedback on the draft scoping requirements, once they are available (TCV).

AGENDA ITEM 5 – CFA FIREFIGHTING AND TRANSMISSION LINES

Brett Boatman, Deputy Chief Office of the CFA West Region provided background on Safe Operating Procedures, Doctrines and training relating to firefighting operations around transmission lines. He explained:

- Safe operating procedures (SOPs) around energy transmission are in the process of being re-written. Training related to the updated SOPs will be rolled out soon.
- That the CFA has been unable to find evidence of high voltage transmission lines starting fires. There is only evidence of distribution lines causing fires.
- That the current CFA advice is that firefighters should maintain a minimum 25m from transmission lines <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/fighting-fires-around-transmission-lines#:~:text=The%20CFA%20operational%20procedures%20states,if%20greater%2C%20when%20fighting%20fires.> Brett said that he would tend to seek to work 25m outside the easement.
- Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) is responsible for making decisions and providing advice on safe operating distances and provided reference to the ESV document '[Electricity Transmission Lines – Bushfire Management and Community Safety.](#)'

Some CRG members raised a range of concerns around transmissions lines and fires including:

- There is still some confusion about the 25m working distance from transmission lines and/or easements. The CRG wishes to get clarification from the CFA and ESV.
- The need to update the Field Emergency Response Guide with clear operational diagrams and guidance and provide greater clarity on the safe distances to work around transmission lines
- Concerns about the risks of flashovers and fires arcing around transmission lines
- The need for a safe working guideline relating to firefighting for landholders hosting transmission lines
- Concerns that transmission lines decrease the ability of firefighters to effectively fight fires in their communities due to access issues
- Concerns that if the project goes ahead that people will no longer continue to volunteer for the CFA.

Brett Boatman did not agree that the transmission line will materially change the risk factor but takes community concerns on board. He also said that if there are no volunteers, it is the local community that will be the poorer for it.

ACTION: Contact ESV and request access to the scientific research that informs their recommended firefighting distances from the transmission lines (Chair/Secretariat).

AGENDA ITEM 6 – IMPROVING PROJECT ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

The Chair requested the CRG's advice on how best to ensure that the community is aware of the opportunity to engage and participate in consultation around the draft scope for the VNI West Project Environmental Effects Statement (EES).

TCV explained that submissions providing feedback on the draft scope for the EES would go through the Engage Victoria platform to the DTP.

TCV advised that some community engagement sessions will not be run by TCV. (Post hoc note: This comment is in relation to the Transmission Licence where the Essential Services Commission will conduct the engagement activities for the consultation.)

Some CRG members provided advice including suggestions to:

- Make the engagement independent of TCV
- Use simple language that everyone can understand
- Use Councils as an avenue to connect with community members and groups who have not engaged
- Explain why it is important that people engage
- Have the ability to access subject matter experts during engagement e.g. ecologists.

The upcoming VicGrid Victorian Transmission Plan (VTIF) workshops were also discussed. A CRG member expressed concern that there was no workshop scheduled in the proposed footprint of VNI West.

ACTION: Provide feedback to VicGrid that their upcoming engagement should include a site in this part of the state (Chair/Secretariat)

ACTION: VicGrid VTIF workshop dates to be distributed to CRG members with the minutes (Secretariat).

Some CRG members expressed concern that the CEO of AEMO has not attended a CRG meeting. Sam Magee advised that two senior AEMO staff, Merryn York (EGM System Design) and Claire Cass (GM Victorian Network Services & Delivery | System Design) are planning to attend the July meeting of the CRG.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – OBSERVER UPDATES AND QUESTIONS

Buloke Shire Council advised that they had attended the meeting in Birchip the same day and that the project is on the ordinary agenda of the Council meeting the following evening.

VicGrid explained that a series of nine drop-in sessions and workshops were scheduled around the State during May and June to discuss the energy transition and receive feedback on the draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan.

AGENDA ITEM 8 – ACTIONS REGISTER

An update on the status of previous meeting actions was received by the CRG. See Appendix A.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – OTHER ITEMS

Sam Magee advised that he had resigned from TCV and would no longer attend CRG meetings.

AGENDA ITEM 10 – NEXT MEETING

- Meeting to review and provide input into the scope of the EES – Date to be confirmed
- 17 July 2024: CRG Meeting

APPENDIX A: ACTIVE ACTION REGISTER – STATUS AS AT 7/05/24

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
CRG1	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding reimbursement preferences.	RMCG	22/9/23	<i>Complete</i>
CRG6	27/11/23	Arrange for an insurer to present to the CRG on what is likely to be covered and other insurance considerations.	RMCG	Early 2024	<i>In progress.</i> The insurance Council of Australia has advised a representative can present at the July 2024 meeting.
CRG7	27/11/23	Facilitate information about insurance for interested community members (may include a standard list of non-negotiable insurance items to be covered by commercial insurers)	TCV, VicGrid	Anticipated mid 2024	<i>Complete.</i> VicGrid and the Insurance Council of Australia have worked together to develop a new fact sheet to address insurance implications and provide guidance when considering access or easement agreements. The fact sheet has been released by Insurance Council of Australia, located here
CRG13	27/11/23	Arrange for the CFA to attend a future CRG meeting to present on firefighting near transmission lines.	RMCG	01/02/24	<i>Complete.</i> CFA attended the meeting on 7/5/2024.
CRG14	14/2/24	Consider establishing working groups to pursue actions raised during CRG meetings	RMCG	Ongoing	<i>Complete.</i> At the meeting on 7/5/2024, the Chair advises that this is possible and working groups can be formed on an as-needs basis.
CRG15	14/2/24	Advocate for experienced agriculture specialist who understands the region to be represented on EES Technical Reference Group (TRG)	TCV	May 2024	<i>Complete.</i> The EES statutory process is administered by DTP and includes establishment of a TRG. Membership is from government agencies, local government and statutory authorities with a statutory, policy or technical interest in the project. If the Minister deems that the project requires an EES, it's likely one of the technical studies required would be an

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
					<p>Agriculture impact assessment.</p> <p>Draft scoping requirements will be prepared and then advertised. Submissions from stakeholders and community will be reviewed to ensure that concerns and issues can be included in the final Scoping requirement and addressed in the assessment.</p> <p>This is the opportunity to ensure concerns are investigated during the EES process.</p>
CRG16	14/2/24	Facilitate advice on the impact of compensation and payments on property valuations, rates and land taxes	TCV	July 2024	<p><i>Complete.</i></p> <p>TCV advised that there many examples of power lines in easements on private land.</p> <p>Council rates are value based, meaning if the value of a property increases, rates will increase.</p> <p>To ensure accurate and clear answers, it's best to approach the relevant Council for a correct answer.</p> <p>Land tax will apply in Vic unless one of several exemptions applies. This is dependent on how property is owned and the owner's individual circumstances.</p> <p>If landholders have questions about taxation and compensation, they can recover reasonable professional fees for advice incurred in relation to compensation</p>
CRG17	14/2/24	Write a letter to DTP requesting that someone who understands rural communities is appointed to the TRG for the VNI West EES.	Chair	20/5/2024	<i>In progress</i>
CRG18	7/5/24	Arrange a meeting with the CRG to discuss and provide feedback on the draft scoping requirements,	TCV	TBC – awaiting draft scoping document	

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
		once they are available.			
CRG19	7/5/2024	Contact ESV and request access to the scientific research that informs their recommended firefighting distances from the transmission lines.	Chair/ Secretariat	July 2024	
CRG20	7/5/2024	Provide feedback to VicGrid that their upcoming engagement should include a site in this part of the state.	Chair/ Secretariat	20/05/2024	
CRG21	7/5/2024	VicGrid VTIF workshop dates to be distributed to CRG members with the minutes.	Secretariat	13/05/2024	

Appendix: B – Meeting slides



VNI West CRG Meeting #4

07/05/2024

Agenda

Timing	Item	Lead
6.00 – 6.10pm	Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country and Introductions	Claire Flanagan-Smith, Chair
6.10 – 6.15 pm	Confirm February meeting minutes	
6.10 – 6.40pm	Project and engagement update	Sam Magee, TCV
6.40 – 7.40pm	CFA – firefighting and transmission lines	Brett Boatman, Deputy Chief Fire Officer of CFA West Region
7.40 – 8.00pm	Improving project engagement across the communities	Claire Flanagan-Smith, Chair
8.00 – 8.10pm	Observer updates and questions	Observers
8.10 – 8.20pm	Action register review	Claire Flanagan-Smith, Chair
8.20 – 8.30pm	Wrap up	



Confirm minutes

February 2024



Engagement update



Glenloch East and Murrabit community roundtables



Wimmera Field Days



April community drop-ins



Stakeholder roundtable



Council briefings



Project update



License application to ESC



Land Access Agreement



Ongoing field surveys (currently geotechnical)



An EES will be required



EES Process





Firefighting near transmission

A discussion with Brett Boatman, Deputy
Chief Fire Officer of CFA West Region





Improving engagement & communication

EES engagement ideas





Observers

Updates and questions





Action register

A review





Thank you for
attending