



VNI West Community Reference Group

MEETING MINUTES

14 February 2024

Charlton Park Complex

Community Reference Group Present: Max Fehring, Claire Grant, Vaughan Toose, John Wright, Brad McDonald, Rachel Lloyd, Barry Batters, Colin Coates, Jon Whykes, Bryan Pedersen, Miles Parry, Brett Hosking, Sam Magee (TCV), Samantha Olsen (TCV), David Hale (RMCG) and Brooke Hermans (RMCG).

Observers: Amanda Coulson (AEMO), Phil Coyne (TCV), Rosanna Lacorcia (TCV), Geoff Caine (VicGrid), Georgia Steven (Energy and Water Ombudsman), Rebecca Clark (Energy and Water Ombudsman), Deepak Sharma (VicGrid – online), Claire Flannagan Smith (RMCG – online).

Apologies: Andrew Borg, Glenden Watts, Marcia McIntyre, Glenda Watts, Sophia Herrington, Daniel Bryce, Daryl Warren, Roger Griffiths (Gannawarra Shire Council), Geoff Rollinson (Gannawarra Shire Council), Lincoln Fitzgerald (Loddon Shire Council), Cr. Wayne O'Toole (Buloke Shire Council), Cr. Alan Getley (Buloke Shire Council), Brent McAlister (Northern Grampians Shire Council), Damien Wieland (Northern Grampians Shire Council).

Absent: N/A

Meeting opened: 6.10 pm.

AGENDA ITEM 1 - WELCOME AND OPEN MEETING

- The Community Reference Group (CRG) Chairperson (David Hale, RMCG) welcomed members, acknowledging their time in attending the meeting and acknowledged the Traditional Owners .
- The Chairperson provided an overview of the agenda and described the scope of the CRG.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - INTRODUCTIONS

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

AGENDA ITEM 3 – MINUTES AND ACTION REGISTER

- The CRG considered the draft minutes of the last meeting held on 27 November 2023.
- The CRG Chairperson explained that a member had requested a change to the minutes relating to insurance and explained that they would be recirculated with the change, allowing one week for any further comments, before being considered as passed.
- Several CRG members expressed the need for the minutes to be circulated more rapidly, explaining that two weeks was too slow.
 - The project team committed to trying to get the minutes circulated more rapidly.
- The CRG considered the Action Register, provided as Appendix A.
 - Several CRG members expressed frustration that issues, such as having speakers attend regarding bushfire and insurance risks, that had been discussed at previous meetings had not been actioned at this meeting. The CRG Chairperson explained that contact with speakers relating to insurance and bushfire had been made and that their attendance would be scheduled at a future meeting.
- The CRG further discussed the issue of bushfire risk, highlighting the concern around the published distances for firefighting around transmission lines and explaining that they would like clarity on these distances and the basis for their determination.
 - The CRG Chairperson re-iterated the commitment to have the CFA to come to the next meeting pending availability.
- The issue of insurance concerns was raised by several CRG members, in light of the tower collapses the day prior.
 - VicGrid noted that the Insurance Council of Australia’s members had advised that as a general rule energy companies would be liable for damage resulting from faulty towers and that this would limit any impact to farmers’ premiums.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – PROJECT STATUS UPDATE

Sam Magee, TCV, provided an update on the VNI West project. Slides from the presentation are included in Appendix B.

- TCV provided an update on the purchase of land for the Tragowel Terminal Station.
- A CRG member asked if the construction of the terminal station at Tragowel could impact water flows and flood neighbouring properties.
 - TCV explained that to build the terminal station they would have to demonstrate that there would be no flood impact on neighbours.
- A CRG member proposed that TCV should consider donating the land at Tragowel that is not required for the terminal station to a local community group or sporting club.
- TCV explained that they had submitted a referral to the Victorian Minister for Planning to determine whether an Environment Effects Statement (EES

-) would be required for the project. The referral was published on 7 February 2024. Further information is available at the [Department of Transport and Planning webpage](#).
- TCV explained the timelines and steps associated with the EES (assuming that the Minister determines that an EES is required; TCV is of the view that an EES will be required) (see Appendix B).
- TCV highlighted that the next major opportunity for the CRG to have input will be the draft EES scope. This will be released for public comment for three weeks.
 - It was agreed that the next CRG meeting will be scheduled to coincide with the public consultation period for the draft EES scope to brief the CRG on the scope and seek their input. TCV advised that the timing is dependent on the Department of Transport and Planning. This may limit the notice to members and may mean members call in remotely.
- TCV explained that the EES will focus on the two kilometre corridor within the 5a area of interest and areas proximal to the area of interest if required.
- Several CRG members raised concerns that the EES process and any resulting changes to the corridor could cause conflict between neighbours.
- CRG members raised the issue of the emotional impact of the project on community members and their relationships and the need for this to be considered in the EES process. It was noted by TCV that this will be considered as part of a social impact assessment in the EES.
- A CRG member requested that the Chair write a letter to the Department of Transport and Planning requesting that someone who understands rural communities is appointed to the Technical Reference Group for the VNI West EES.
- A concern was raised by a CRG member that their experience with a TCV Landholder Liaison had been unsatisfactory due to the Officer being unable to answer questions asked and other interactions.
 - It was noted by other CRG members that a request can be made for a different Landholder Liaison.
- TCV advised that a regional office was now open in Kerang two days per week.
- TCV advised that ecological surveys have been continuing, primarily on public land and that private land surveys would commence shortly.
- TCV provided an update on the Victorian Supreme Court dismissal of the Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance challenge, the Transgrid Draft Route report, the Plan B update and the Australian Energy Infrastructure Community Engagement Review final report (see Appendix B).

AGENDA ITEM 5 – COMPENSATION AND PAYMENTS

Sam Magee of TCV and Deepak Sharma of VicGrid provided an overview of compensation arrangements for the VNI West project (see Appendix B).

- Several CRG members raised concerns that the \$8,000 annual payment per linear kilometre for 25 years (CPI indexed) was significantly less than the payments being received for wind farm infrastructure on properties and should be reviewed.
 - VicGrid and TCV explained that the \$8,000 annual payment per linear kilometre for 25 years (CPI indexed) is one small component of the overall compensation arrangements.
 - TCV advised that any compensation package needs to be attractive or else landholders won't agree to grant TCV easements on their land.
 - VicGrid advised that guidelines set to be released in the coming months will provide further detail on Victorian Government compensation initiatives.
- A CRG member questioned why the Victorian Government are paying the \$8,000 per annum rather than the transmission service provider.
 - VicGrid explained that the \$8,000 per annum is not a Victorian Government budget expense as the costs are recovered through transmission user service charges.
- A CRG member raised a concern that only a small number of neighbours would receive compensation.
 - VicGrid explained that new guidelines are under development that would provide for neighbour compensation, different classifications of neighbours, how compensation would be determined and where the funding will come from.

- A CRG member raised questions around the tax treatment of compensation payments.
 - TCV explained that tax implications of compensation depend on the recipient's personal circumstances and that TCV would pay for tax advisors to help those negotiating compensation to understand the tax implications on their package, before finalising negotiations.
- A CRG member raised a question about how the annual \$8,000 payment would impact property valuations and local government rates.
 - TCV explained any impact on rates will be factored into compensation.
- A CRG member raised a concern about comparing compensation levels between Victoria, NSW and QLD due to differing property values.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – COMMUNITY BENEFITS

- Deepak Sharma, VicGrid provided an overview of existing mechanisms and those under development to allow for the community to benefit from the VNI West project (see Appendix B).
- VicGrid described four broad types of potential benefit to the community including local procurement, Transmission Service Provider investment, Renewable Energy Zone fund and the Traditional Owner Fund.
- The CRG Chairperson explained that there will be opportunities for the community to share their ideas and proposals for community benefits.
- The CRG raised several potential investments that could benefit communities, including improved roads, investment in kindergartens, subsidised household solar, community batteries and improved power reliability. CRG members also queried who would be decision maker for any grants schemes and concerns that the beneficiaries should be the most impacted in the community.
 - TCV indicated that if grants schemes were a part of the Transmission Service Provider investment, they would be community led.

OTHER BUSINESS/NEXT STEPS

- The Energy and Water Ombudsman (EWOL) representative explained that they are non-government and Victorian based and working closely with the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC). In cases where the community contacts EWOL or AEIC and it is better dealt with by the other organisation they will refer the community member to the other organisation.
- A CRG member raised concerns that transmission tower engineering needed review following the tower collapse the day before the meeting.
 - TCV explained that the VNI West towers will be built to Australian Standards which evolve over time.
- A CRG member raised a question about what they could share from the CRG meetings with other community members.
 - The CRG Chairperson and TCV advised that:
 - Sharing insights and information is a good thing that is encouraged in accordance with the CRG Terms of Reference
 - Minutes should not be circulated until approved by the CRG and uploaded to the TCV website.
 - Statements or personal views from other CRG members within the meeting should be considered as confidential.

NEXT MEETINGS

A plan of meeting dates for 2024 was presented to the CRG including:

- April/May (to align with DTP Scoping timeframes, notice to be provided in advance)
- 17 July
- 11 September
- 30 October

- The CRG provided feedback that May and November dates are difficult due to on-farm obligations.
- It was recognised that it is important that the May meeting is timed to ensure CRG can provide comment on the EES scope, whilst also trying to consider CRG member obligations. So far as possible, TCV will provide notice in advance and RMCG will facilitate members remote access as required.
- It was proposed that the November meeting be at the start of the month.
- David Hale announced he will be stepping aside as CRG Chairperson. RMCG Principal, Claire Flanagan-Smith, will assume Chairperson duties at the next CRG – likely to be held in April/May.

Meeting closed 8.54pm

Appendix: A – Action list

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
CRG1	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding reimbursement preferences.	DH (RMCG)	22/9/23	In Progress
CRG6	27/11/23	Arrange for an insurer to present to the CRG on what is likely to be covered and other insurance considerations.	DH (RMCG)	Early 2024	The insurance Council of Australia has advised a representative will attend a forthcoming CRG meeting pending availability
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	VicGrid is preparing key messages about insurance implications with the support of the Insurance Council Australia and its members. VicGrid is also investigating options for guidance materials for landholders around insurance implications when considering access or easement agreements.
CRG13	27/11/23	Arrange for the CFA to attend a future CRG meeting to present on firefighting near transmission lines.	DH (RMCG)	01/02/24	The CFA has indicated a representative from District 16 will attend next CRG meeting pending availability.
CRG14	14/2/24	Consider establishing working groups to pursue actions raised during CRG meetings	RMCG	Ongoing	To be raised at next CRG: members to indicate their interest to contribute to discussions on bushfires and insurance between CRG meetings
CRG15	14/2/24	Write a letter to advocate for person who understands rural communities to be represented on EES Technical Reference Group (TRG)	CRG Chair (RMCG)	May 2024	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 Agriculture impact assessment.

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
					<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	Invite observer Councils to share their experience on the issue in a forthcoming agenda pending availability

Appendix: B – Meeting slides



Community Reference Group

February 2024



Acknowledgement of Country

TCV acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country across the area of interest for VNI West, including the Barapa Barapa, Wamba Wemba, Barengi Gadjin and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples and the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk Nations and any other Traditional Owners who are impacted by the project.

We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to Elders past and present.

Agenda



1. Welcome + introductions
2. Minutes
3. Actions Register
4. Project update
5. Compensation and payments
6. Break
7. Community benefits
8. Other business

Introductions

Minutes

Action Register (and other issues)

Project Update

Project update - General



- **Supreme Court decision**
 - Victoria's Supreme Court dismissed the Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance's challenge to the Minister's orders
 - The Court found 'There is no factual basis [that] the minister acted with improper purpose.'
- **Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner**
 - AEIC Community Engagement Review final report released
 - Commonwealth Government confirmed that it has accepted all recommendations in principle. The Government will now work with states and territories, industry and communities to address the review's findings.
- **Transgrid Draft Route Report**
 - Published 29 January 2024, the report provides route details, how and why the preferred route was selected, and other route options considered.
 - Transgrid is calling for feedback by 5pm 4 March 2024
- **Plan B update**
 - AEMO provided an initial response to Plan B in August 2023.
 - The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has commissioned an independent review of Plan B.
 - We anticipate the findings from the review will be published in the near future

Project update

Key activities:



EES referral submitted



Kerang Regional Office open



Ecology surveys continue



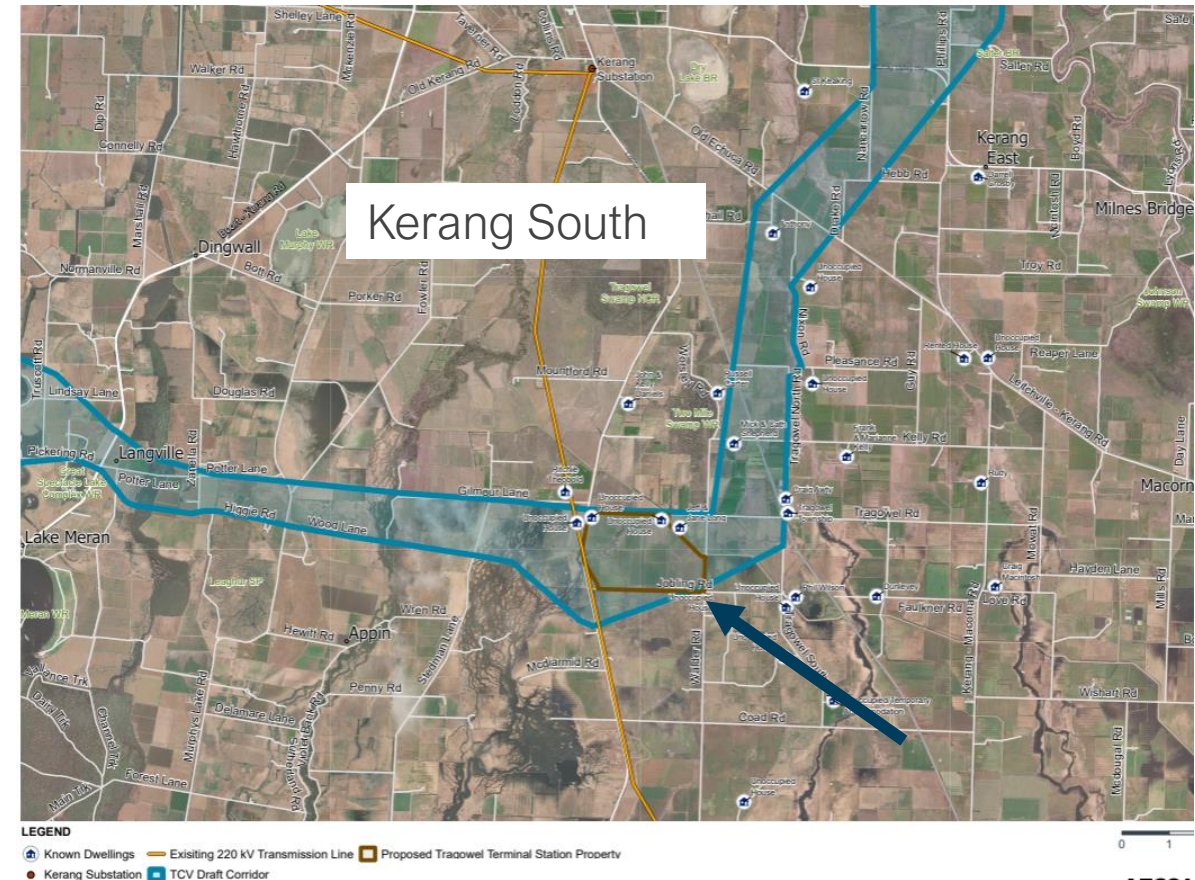
Proposed terminal station site - land purchase announced



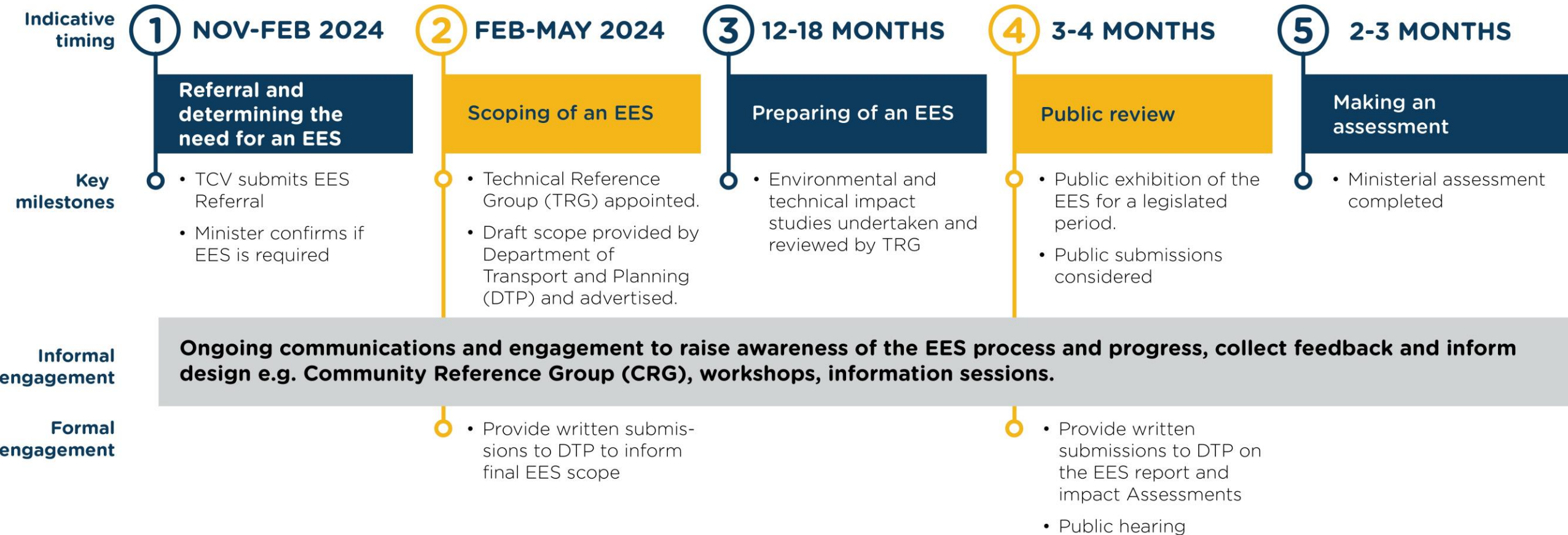
Tragowel community meeting

Tragowel Terminal Station

- TCV purchased (12 February) a property in Tragowel, proposed as the location for a new terminal station as part of VNI West.
- This is an important step for the project which will allow the site to be included as part of the planning and assessments process over the next 12-18 months, as we continue to work on finding the best route for the transmission line.
- While the final route for the transmission lines is yet to be determined, the location of the terminal is important for project design. We can't finalise the route for VNI West without knowing where the terminal station is proposed to be located.



Environment Effects Statement



Compensation and payment

Benefit and impact mitigation overview

REZ Fund

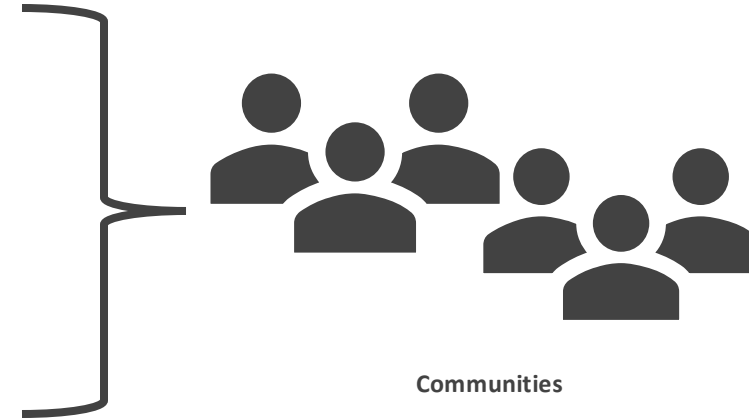


Under development. Fund to be established and managed by Vic Grid

TO Fund

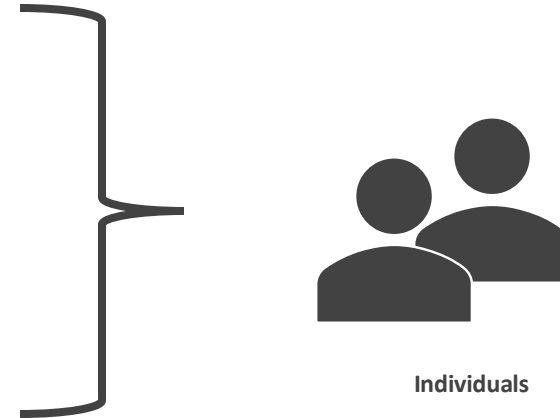


Under development. Traditional Owner Fund is proposed to fairly compensate Traditional Owner groups for impacts to Traditional lands



Benefit and impact mitigation overview

Land access payment	----->	Confirmed. \$10,000, with payment split over two years
Landholder payment	----->	Confirmed. \$8,000, per linear kilometre, per annum for 25 years (indexed to CPI)
Easement compensation	----->	Confirmed. \$20,000 sign on payment + compensation for any loss of land value and productivity from the VNI West project (difference between value with and without the transmission infrastructure)
Neighbour impact compensation	----->	Under development. Vicgrid is developing guidelines for transmission network service providers to fairly compensate significantly impacted neighbouring properties



Notes:

TCV will cover landholder's reasonable professional advisor fees
Easement compensation is most significant fund for 'significantly impacted' individuals

Observers

Other Business

Next Steps

CRG next steps



- Publish CRG meeting minutes on TCV website.
- Chairperson's summary to be drafted and shared with CRG members.

CRG dates

- 1 May
- 17 July
- 11 September
- 27 November

- Key priorities for 2024:
 - EES
 - Fire fighting
 - Insurance



Thank you



For more information visit

[transmissionvictoria.com.au](https://www.transmissionvictoria.com.au)