

# VNI West Community Reference Group

## MEETING MINUTES

Monday 27 November 2023

Charlton Park Complex

**Present:** Andrew Borg, Daniel Bryce, Max Fehring, John Wright, Brad McDonald, Rachel Lloyd, Marcia McIntyre, Glenda Watts, Barry Batters, Colin Coates, Jon Whykes, Byran Pedersen, Brett Hosking, Mitchell Hume (TCV), Sam Magee (TCV), George Warne (RMCG, Secretariat), David Hale (RMCG, Chair)

**Observers:** Chris Sounness (Wimmera Southern Mallee Development), Roger Griffiths (Gannawarra Shire Council), Alan Getley (Buloke Shire Council), Rebecca Clark (Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria), Georgia Steven (Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria), Geoff Caine (VicGrid), Nick Sondhu (Buloke Shire Council), Phil Coyne (TCV), Amanda Coulson (TCV), Rosanna Lacorcica (TCV)

**Apologies:** Glenden Watts, Vaughan Toose, Sophia Herrington, Daryl Warren

**Absent:** Miles Parry, Matthew McGurk

**Meeting opened: 6.05 pm.**

## AGENDA ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND OPEN MEETING

- The Community Reference Group (CRG) Chairperson (David Hale, RMCG) welcomed members and observers to the meeting and acknowledged Djaara as the Traditional Owners of the lands where the meeting took place.

## AGENDA ITEM 2 – INTRODUCTIONS

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

## AGENDA ITEM 3 – MINUTES AND ACTION REGISTER

- CRG members considered draft minutes of the last meeting of the CRG held on 11 September 2023. One point of clarification was raised on how the approvals process for the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process was captured in the minutes.
- CRG members passed and carried a motion for minutes to be approved, pending any changes submitted by members who had not yet reviewed the draft. Members were given two further days from the meeting to provide feedback.

## ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS	UPDATE 27/11
CRG1	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding reimbursement preferences	DH (RMCG)	22/9/23	Underway	The Chairperson confirmed that he would finalise consultation before next meeting.
CRG2	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding comfort of sharing their name publicly as a member of the CRG.	DH (RMCG)	22/9/23	Complete	-
CRG3	11/9/23	Provide more information on status of insurance discussions.	GC (VicGrid)	30/11/23	In progress	Fact sheet being developed in January 2024 based on discussions with Insurance Council of Australia.
CRG4	11/9/23	Create a section on the TCV website that links to AEMO reports.	MH (TCV)	30/11/23	In progress	Link has been created.
CRG5	11/9/23	Improve catering at next CRG meeting, including dessert.	DH (RMCG)	30/11/23	Complete	Improvement noted.

## DISCUSSION ARISING FROM ACTIONS

- CRG members questioned risks associated with contractors leaving gates open which could result in livestock loss, accidents and subsequent insurance claims.
- Several CRG members expressed frustration that more information is not yet available on insurance implications of VNI-West given the prevalence of existing 500KV lines elsewhere in Australia. It was reiterated that factsheets are not sufficient to provide certainty for landholders, and TCV or the State Government should commit to ensuring there is no risk being incurred by landholders.
  - TCV and VicGrid agreed to seek more information from the CRG on the matter from the insurance sector.
- TCV noted that liability for on-property works would be detailed in landholder agreements.
- TCV noted liability would:
  - Need to consider differing farming activities between southern Victoria and northern Victoria such as the use of large-scale harvesters around transmission lines.
  - Consider the impact of any loss of control of farming decisions and activities within TCV easements.
- CRG members expressed concern about negative community sentiment in relation to the project and questioned how TCV intends to improve community sentiment.
  - TCV accepted much more work is needed to engage communities and impacted landholders directly.
- CRG members questioned the rate of payment to landholders and noted that payments should be similar to those received for hosting wind turbines to compensate for potential reduction in land value.
  - TCV indicated the payments will need to align with the *Victorian Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*.
- CRG members noted concern that direct benefits to locals and communities affected by the development were not apparent as part of the community benefits package and encouraged TCV to identify a package of community benefits for the region.
  - CRG Chairperson noted that this is essential, and that work is being undertaken by VicGrid to plan for a community benefits program.
- CRG members raised a concern that although a number of landholders will have the line pass through their property, a larger number of near neighbours may be affected and would not receive payments.
  - TCV explained that VicGrid is developing a compensation program for near neighbours.
- CRG members expressed concern regarding potential impacts on health from electromagnetic fields.
  - TCV noted that there are many studies into electromagnetic impacts. These have shown that there is no evidence that EMF causes health impacts in humans. Australian Standards set out electromagnetic field standards, and these are adhered to.
- (*For more information on EMF see Further Reading below*)

## AGENDA ITEM 4 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

- CRG members considered changes to the CRG's Terms of Reference arising from the previous CRG meeting. The Chairperson noted no feedback had been provided on these changes (circulated after the last CRG meeting).
  - CRG members sought clarification on the background statements in the Terms of Reference that were seen as overly subjective. CRG Chairperson undertook to remove contested statements and noted further changes would be required to specify how new members and observers are approved.
  - CRG members questioned how the success of the engagement will be measured.
  - Chairperson allowed members until the next CRG to consider and submit suggestions for any additional changes.

## **AGENDA ITEM 5 – UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS STATEMENT**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS PROCESS**

- Jeff Smith (AECOM) spoke about the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, detailing key milestones, activities and the decision-making process. Slides from the presentation are included in Appendix A. AECOM noted that the preparation of the EES is anticipated to occur between early 2024 and the end of 2025.
- CRG members questioned why TCV doesn't require the EES process to take place without the request of the Minister for Planning.
  - TCV explained that requesting the EES to take place would not comply with the EES process, where it must be requested by the Minister.
- CRG members asked whether the EES would assess the impacts of the combined transmission lines, solar farms and wind farms.
  - AECOM explained that a cumulative assessment including the consideration of known projects such as solar and wind farms would be part of the project approval process for each project, however, projects that are not yet conceived or approved could not be considered in the EES.
- CRG members questioned how the impact on the community would be assessed as part of the EES – including their feelings about the initiative and its impacts on well-being.
  - AECOM advised that broad social impacts would be considered in the EES process. All previous submissions received during the planning process that detailed concerns with the project would be considered.

*(For more information on the EES process see Further Reading below)*

### **AGENDA ITEM 6 – COMMENTS/QUESTIONS**

- CRG members requested further information on the roles of different organisations in the VNI West Project be developed and shared.
- CRG members requested that improved maps be made available at the meetings and on the website of the proposed route. In particular, this included maps at a greater scale and level of detail.
  - *(To view project areas in high detail, see interactive map in Further Reading below.)*
- CRG members asked about whether an application for a transmission licence had been made.
  - TCV responded that a draft was submitted earlier in the year. A revised application is in progress, responding to detailed comments, revised corridor and release of Land Access Guidelines. The new application will be submitted once it is finalised by TCV.
- CRG members questioned the status of the review into the Plan B report.
  - VicGrid explained that the Plan B authors are currently considering the review's findings and VicGrid are awaiting their feedback.
- CRG members expressed frustration at the cancellation of the planned town hall event in St Arnaud in October.
  - TCV noted they understood the frustration but had been advised the meeting could not proceed due to safety considerations.
- CRG members raised concerns that although there is a CFA guideline around firefighting under transmission lines, there were reports of mixed messages coming from the CFA about allowable firefighting distances near 500Kv transmission lines.
  - CRG members requested that the CFA attend an upcoming CRG and outline how incident controllers will direct people in the case of a fire.

## OTHER BUSINESS/NEXT STEPS

- A representative of Victoria’s Energy and Water Ombudsman explained the role of the Ombudsman and the free service that they offer. She explained that they are an independent service that investigates and resolves complaints around Victoria’s electricity, gas and water sector.

## NEXT MEETING

- CRG Chairperson noted the next meeting will likely be scheduled in February.

**Meeting closed 8:55 pm**

## SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

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	Underway
CRG3	11/9/23	Provide more information on status of insurance discussions.	GC (VicGrid)	30/11/23	In progress
CRG4	11/9/23	Create a section on the TCV website that links to AEMO reports.	MH (TCV)	30/11/23	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	In progress
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	TBC	Planning
CRG8	27/11/23	Review Terms of Reference including input from all members.	DH (RMCG)	01/02/24	In progress
CGR9	27/11/23	Provide a copy of the EES presentation and a link to the EES process guidelines to the CRG, the scope of the EES process and Jeff Smith’s contact details.	DH (RMCG)	11/12/23	Complete
CRG10	27/11/23	The Chairperson to write to the Minister for Planning on behalf of the CRG recommending that an EES should be conducted on VNI West.	DH (RMCG)	11/12/23	Complete
CRG11	27/11/23	Share the contact details of the Energy and Water Ombudsman with the CRG.	DH (RMCG)	11/12/23	Complete

ACTION #	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
CRG12	27/11/23	Prepare a table of acronyms and a table or chart outlining the roles of organisations in the VNI West project.	DH (RMCG)	01/02/24	In progress
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	In progress

## FURTHER READING

**EMF:** [Electro Magnetic Fields](#) (ARPANSA website)

<https://www.arpansa.gov.au/understanding-radiation/radiation-sources/powerlines>

**EES:** [Environmental Effects Statements in Victoria](#) (DTP website)

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/environment-effects-statements-in-victoria>

**Detailed maps:** See [TCV interactive map](#)

<https://vniwest.mysocialpinpoint.com.au/vniwest#/>

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**Document review and authorisation**

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1.0	Final	18.03.2024	B.Hermans D.Hale	C.Flanagan-Smith	E. Kelly	C.Flanagan-Smith	CRG

# Appendix: A – Meeting slides