

**RMCG**

**VNI West**

# **Community Reference Group**

**MEETING MINUTES**

11 September 2023

Charlton Park Complex

**Present:** Max Fehring, Andrew Borg, Vaughan Toose, Glenden Watts, Brad McDonald, Rachel Lloyd, Marcia McIntyre, Colin Kemp, Daryl Warren, Glenda Watts, Colin Coates, Mitchell Hume (TCV, Manager Community and Stakeholder Engagement), Sam Magee (TCV, Project Director), Geoff Caine (VicGrid Regional Engagement Manager – Loddon Mallee | Project Delivery), Claire Flanagan-Smith (RMCG, Secretariat), David Hale (RMCG, Chair)

**Observers:** Cr Alan Getley (Mayor, Buloke Shire Council), Wayne O’Toole (CEO, Buloke Shire Council)

**Apologies:** John Wright, Barry Batters

**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.
- The Chairperson summarised the purpose of the CRG:
  - increase community understanding about the VNI-W Project, processes and key milestones;
  - enable two-way conversations between TCV and the local community and stakeholders;
  - provide a transparent forum to discuss issues raised by the community in relation to TCV and VNI West;
  - capture community feedback and suggestions to assist with project decision making;
  - provide a forum for community input into regional benefit sharing opportunities; and
  - develop an avenue to communicate how community suggestions and ideas have been considered or acted on.
- The chairperson noted that the CRG could provide:
  - a constructive forum for members to better understand what is happening with VNI-W now and into the future;
  - accountability and transparency in the process; and
  - an opportunity for members to represent the views of the communities that they belong to.

## **AGENDA ITEM 2 - INTRODUCTIONS**

- All CRG members, project team members and observers introduced themselves and discussed their reasons for coming to the meeting.
- It was noted by most CRG members that they would like to voice strongly held community concerns and ensure the project considers the views of the people it will impact and the landholders who will have this infrastructure on their properties.
- Community benefits and the consultation process to date were also matters of interest.

## **AGENDA ITEM 3 - PROJECT UPDATE**

- Sam Magee (TCV) provided an overview of the project background and current status. This included the role of TCV and why it was set up as well as why VNI-W is needed and why option 5A was selected as the preferred option.
- Geoff Caine (VicGrid) noted that VicGrid is working towards becoming the future transmission planner for Victoria. VicGrid is also responsible for coordinating the planning and development of our renewable energy zones (REZs).
- Benefits to the Charlton community and the local energy grid were questioned. TCV noted that the project will improve electricity system reliability across all of Victoria but does not involve upgrades to local distribution networks.
- TCV noted the draft corridor will be narrowed considerably by the middle of next year, from a width of approximately 2km to an indicative easement of about 100 metres. This easement will not be finalised until the completion of the planning and approvals process. It is not until this point that an easement would potentially be registered on a property title.
- TCV answered questions about the approvals process and outlined that the project will be subject to Victorian State Government approvals and is likely to go through an Environment Effects Statement (EES) process.
- CRG members asked what the EES was and TCV shared that the Minister for Planning would identify which issues would be considered through the EES, such as biodiversity, agriculture and cultural heritage.
- CRG members questioned how Plan B is being considered. TCV said they do not agree with the analysis undertaken in or the findings of the Plan B Report. VicGrid highlighted that the State Government is launching an independent review of the merits of Plan B. This is being done in

collaboration with the Plan B authors and AEMO. They are hoping to release findings towards the end of this year.

- CRG members queried how the corridor will be released to the public and asked why it wasn't being announced through a town hall.
- TCV said they will release the corridor after all efforts have been made to contact impacted landholders. The release will include an email update, a media release and social media. The release and these communications will be closely followed by the series of community events in October, which includes Town Halls.
- The CRG said that some landholders had been left "TCV has visited" cards on their cars, which the members said was not good enough.
- TCV answered questions about contact with landholders and shared there are eight landholder liaisons, each of whom are attempting to contact the landholders for around 40 properties. At the time of the meeting, approximately 115 landholders had been contacted.
- CRG members questioned why there have been multiple options proposed for the project and whether it would continue to change based on the response of communities. TCV said that the Project Assessment Conclusions Report (PACR) sets out the analysis process and the justification for the selection of option 5A as the preferred option. TCV highlighted they do not foresee any changes occurring and Option 5A was not selected because of lack of opposition, it was the best option from a multi-criteria assessment, which considered factors outside of the narrow, economic test in the RIT-T, including social, cultural and environmental issues.
- TCV answered questions about how the project would be paid for and shared that all electricity consumers will pay for VNI-W.
- CRG members questioned whether the end owner and operator of the transmission line will be an overseas company. TCV confirmed that until the tender process is complete, it can't say who will build, own and operate the transmission line.

## AGENDA ITEM 4 - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The chairperson led a review of the CRG's Draft Terms of Reference. A summary of comments raised during this review is included in Table 1.

**Table 1. Feedback on draft CRG Terms of Reference**

ITEM	CHANGE SUGGESTED	DECISION
<b>Our (TCV) commitment</b>		
"Answer questions in a timely manner".	<p>CRG members want to ensure that participation in the group is a valuable use of time and TCV are accountable for questions and actions arising from meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain an actions register to review undertakings that have been made.</li> <li>▪ Note TCV will commit to answering questions, and where not possible, TCV will explain why.</li> <li>▪ TCV will aim to provide an update within 3 weeks of the meeting.</li> <li>▪ Action items will be added to agenda for subsequent meetings.</li> <li>▪ Onus will be on the Chair to ensure questions are answered.</li> </ul>	Agreed
<b>The Community Reference Group</b>		
<b>Scope</b>	Change "community" to "communities".	Agreed
<b>Out of scope</b>	Nothing raised.	-
<b>Membership</b>	<p>Concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strong representation of farming communities</li> </ul>	TCV note everyone who applied is on the

ITEM	CHANGE SUGGESTED	DECISION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Under representation of communities from the North.</li> </ul>	CRG and encourage members to suggest further participants who may fill the gap.
<b>Member requirements</b>	Change wording so it is not “compulsory” to attend all meetings.	Agreed
<b>Member roles</b>	<p>Regarding “share information with their communities about the project where appropriate.”</p> <p>Change to “each CRG member may share information with their communities about the project where appropriate.”</p>	Agreed
<b>Member remuneration &amp; payment of costs</b>	<p>TCV noted they feel it is fair and reasonable to compensate people for time and costs, hence the offer to remunerate CRG members.</p> <p>Some CRG members noted that compensation should be available for travel, especially when people are in financial need or travelling long distances.</p>	<p>TCV to offer compensation that members can opt in or out of.</p> <p>Chairperson to make contact with each group member to discuss.</p>
<b>Time commitment</b>	CRG members agreed this was reasonable but note that it may increase depending on project milestones.	Agreed
<b>Working groups</b>	Nothing raised	-
<b>Vacancies</b>	Nothing raised	-
<b>Resourcing and additional attendees</b>		
<b>Chairperson</b>	<p>Note that the chairperson is independent, however, they are contracted and paid by TCV.</p> <p>Add note that the chairperson will act independently of TCV and its subcontractors.</p>	Agreed
<b>Secretariat</b>	<p>Action the same notes reflected in ‘Chairperson’ above.</p> <p>The next invitation should come from RMCG.</p> <p>Add ‘Minutes’ as a section in the Terms of Reference. Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Draft minutes circulated within two weeks.</li> <li>▪ Members can suggest changes via the chairperson before the next CRG meeting.</li> <li>▪ At the next meeting, the CRG will move to endorse the minutes from the previous as a record of that meeting.</li> <li>▪ Meeting minutes should be available publicly for transparency.</li> </ul>	Agreed
<b>Other attendance</b>	<p>As part of the agenda, the chairperson will circulate the names of additional attendees who have been invited.</p> <p>A CRG member can raise concerns about other attendees with the chairperson who will consider the matters raised and make a determination.</p>	Agreed
<b>Meetings</b>	CRG members are encouraged to advise the chairperson if they would like to change the location of the meeting.	Agreed
<b>Code of conduct</b>	<p>Change “at all times” to “where appropriate”.</p> <p>Change the media dot point to be consistent with media section.</p>	Agreed
<b>Conflict resolution</b>	This section should apply to TCV, observers and other attendees as well as CRG members.	Agreed

ITEM	CHANGE SUGGESTED	DECISION
<b>Media and confidentiality</b>	Chairperson to consider whether a personal summary is appropriate for the media and propose an option at the next CRG meeting.	Agreed
<b>Conflict of interest</b>	Nothing raised	-
<b>Reviewing the Terms of Reference</b>	Nothing raised	-
<b>Other</b>	<p>CRG members questioned the process which will occur if the group cannot agree on a decision or matter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TCV noted that the CRG is not generally a decision-making forum and the priority is to hear a diverse group of perspectives.</li> <li>▪ The meeting minutes will reflect discussion and note where matters were agreed, or where there were multiple/ opposing views.</li> </ul>	-

## AGENDA ITEM 5 – ENGAGEMENT UPDATE OF NEXT STEPS

TCV (Mitchell Hume) presented an overview of previous engagement activities, a summary of what TCV has heard, and what is scheduled in the month ahead.

- CRG members asked that TCV and its consultants provide more answers to community and ensure that there are skilled experts on hand to answer questions, otherwise they said it looked like TCV was just there to ‘tick the box.’
- TCV noted the town halls in October will provide the opportunity for community members to ask questions and TCV will make all attempts to ensure there are technical experts to respond to specific questions about important topics like farming and fire safety.
- TCV noted that the feedback from the community was appreciated and is informing how they can do better.
- Some CRG members noted that several TCV representatives do not have enough of an understanding of farming, environmental issues and fighting fires. CRG members highlighted that TCV should expect a lot of questions which have been raised previously, and given they have had months to develop answers, they should be able to provide them.
- CRG members noted that it is integral that TCV demonstrate they are listening by taking notes and then share how the feedback has been acted on.
  - TCV noted that they received feedback on note taking in the previous round of engagement. TCV highlighted they do capture feedback from community members and held de-brief sessions after each event to capture key themes. Reports on the previous round of engagement have been published and are available on the TCV website.
- TCV noted they will consider consolidating all relevant reports on their webpage that includes AEMO reports to make sure it is easy for people to find the information they need.
- Closing notes and suggestions from CRG members included:
  - Try and get a little bit of local knowledge – have a quiet coffee or beer.
  - If the community are going to have this infrastructure, then the process needs to be undertaken properly.
  - Future CRG meetings should include better catering and dessert.
  - The CRG needs to understand how the information they provide is being used. Request to add this as an agenda item at the next meeting.

## OTHER MATTERS

### INSURANCE

- CRG members questioned when there will be further information available about insurance.

- VicGrid noted they are undertaking work to address this topic and looking to develop a fact sheet in collaboration with the Australian Insurance Council that will help answer those questions.
- Colin Coates noted he is meeting with the local VFF and an insurance underwriter. Indications from his insurer is that it will not be the responsibility of landholders.

## PRIVACY OF MEMBERS

- The chairperson will confirm which members are comfortable with their email addresses being shared with other members of the CRG.
- Some members may not want their name publicly announced.
- TCV noted it is important for transparency that members are open to sharing their names publicly.
- The chairperson will contact each CRG member individually to discuss.

## NEXT MEETING

Tentatively scheduled for second last week of November 2023.

**Meeting closed 8.45pm**

## ACTIONS

ACTION #	ACTION IDENTIFIER	DATE ACTION RAISED	ACTION ITEM	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE	STATUS
CRG1	DH	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding reimbursement preferences.	DH (RMCG)	22/9/23	Completed
CRG2	DH	11/9/23	Contact CRG members regarding comfort of sharing their name publicly as a member of the CRG.	DH (RMCG)	22/9/23	Completed
CRG3	GW	11/9/23	Provide more information on status of insurance discussions.	GC (VicGrid)	30/11/23	In progress
CRG4	DW	11/9/23	Create a section on the TCV website that links to AEMO reports.	MH (TCV)	30/11/23	In progress
CRG5	CC	11/9/23	Improve catering at next CRG meeting, including dessert.	DH (RMCG)	30/11/23	In progress