

INQUIRY: IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Answers to Supplementary Questions

Hearing: 13 May 2025

Questions from Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Socioeconomic, Cultural, Agricultural, and Environmental Impacts

1. Can you outline how the environmental footprint of REZ construction, such as extensive land clearing and use of concrete and steel, has been accounted for in your sustainability assessments?

Answer:

1. The environmental factors of projects in a renewable energy zone (REZ) are taken into consideration in the environmental impact assessment of each project under the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. The Planning Secretary issues Environmental Assessment Requirements for each project, which outline the environmental factors, impact assessment guidelines and agency requirements for the projects.

Impacts to biodiversity values from REZ construction are assessed under the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme established under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The scheme requires impacts to biodiversity be avoided, minimised and then offset. In relation to land clearing, projects must demonstrate how they have applied the scheme.

EnergyCo’s projects consider or assess climate change and greenhouse gas impacts in accordance with relevant NSW Government policies. For example, in the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project, emissions arising from land clearing, transport and the production and materials used in the construction of the project, such as concrete and steel, are considered.

Under Clause 192(1)(f) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021, the project environmental impact statement must include the reasons justifying the carrying out of the infrastructure, considering biophysical, economic and social factors, including the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The most relevant ecologically sustainable development principle to transmission infrastructure is the “conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity”, which is addressed through the project’s extensive biodiversity assessment and Biodiversity Offset Package, which considered the vegetation clearing required to facilitate the project.

Fire Risk and Insurance Implications

2. Given the traditionally critical role paddocks and open farmland have played as fire breaks, how has the government assessed the potential impact of replacing these areas with dense installations of solar panels?

Answer:

2. The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) will respond to this question.

Additional information could be sought from the NSW Rural Fire Service.

3. Have assessments been conducted on how the presence of extensive solar farms could alter the spread or intensity of fires during hot, dry, and windy conditions typical of catastrophic bushfire scenarios in NSW?

Answer:

3. DPHI will respond to this question.
Additional information could be sought from the NSW Rural Fire Service.

4. Can you provide these assessments to the committee?

Answer:

4. DPHI will respond to this question.
Additional information could be sought from the NSW Rural Fire Service.

5. Solar panels contain combustible materials and electrical components; has there been comprehensive research into how these panels behave under catastrophic fire conditions, including potential toxic emissions?

Answer:

5. EnergyCo is not aware of any publicly available, comprehensive research into how solar panels behave under catastrophic fire conditions, including potential toxic emissions, either in the Australian, NSW, or internationally.
- Research is ongoing into the relationship between solar panels and fire. This research is mostly focussed on the prevalence, causes and prevention of bush and grass fires by panels in solar farms and fires in domestic rooftop solar panel systems.
- Further information on this question could be sought from Fire and Rescue NSW.

6. Have local emergency services, including RFS, been involved in planning and assessing potential impacts from REZ developments on their ability to control and manage bushfires?

Answer:

6. DPHI has advised that it typically engages with the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and other emergency services at multiple stages of the assessment process.

Among other matters of consideration, this includes ensuring that the development complies with relevant asset protection requirements in the NSW Rural Fire Service’s Planning for Bushfire Protection.

Fire risk concerns raised by these agencies, including any potential impacts to bushfire management capabilities, are given careful consideration and must be addressed by applicants as part of their environmental assessment.

State significant developments assessed under the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* are provided with Planning Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements. These requirements outline what must be addressed in the project’s environmental impact statement which is a requirement for development consent. The Environmental Assessment Requirements include key issues to address and stakeholders to consult. Where hazards such as bushfire threat are identified, these matters must be addressed in the environmental impact statement.

For most renewable energy projects, Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service will be referred to for advice including measures to minimise bushfire risk. Further information on this question could be sought from Fire and Rescue NSW and the Rural Fire Service.

7. Are there regular drills or exercises conducted specifically to test emergency access and fire management strategies around large-scale solar installations in NSW?

Answer:

7. The conditions of development consent for renewable energy projects classified as state significant development typically require the proponent to prepare and implement an emergency plan.

Further information on this question could be sought from Fire and Rescue NSW and the Rural Fire Service.

8. What guarantees can you provide that emergency services will have sufficient access and mobility to effectively respond to fires within or around extensive solar installations, particularly in rural and remote areas?

Answer:

8. DPHI has advised it typically engages with the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and other emergency services at multiple stages of the assessment process. Any access and mobility issues raised at this time are to be addressed by the applicant prior to receiving development consent.

Further, the conditions of development consent for renewable energy projects classified as state significant development typically require the proponent to prepare and implement an emergency plan.

For most renewable energy projects in rural setting, the NSW Rural Fire Service must be consulted on the project and provide advice on measures to minimise bushfire risk.

Further information on this question could be sought from Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service.

9. In extreme fire conditions, will solar infrastructure limit the use of aerial firefighting assets due to potential hazards or reflectivity issues posed by solar panels or turbines?

Answer:

9. DPHI will respond to this question.
Further information could be sought from the NSW Rural Fire Service.

10. Has the Government planned or implemented any mandatory design or layout standards for solar installations specifically aimed at reducing their potential to exacerbate fire risk?

Answer:

10. DCCEEW is not aware of planned or implemented any mandatory design or layout standards

11. Considering that transmission lines themselves can pose significant ignition risks, have specific risk assessments been done on the increased number of high-voltage transmission lines needed for REZ projects?

Answer:

11. Energy Co is not aware of any instances of a fire caused by a 500 kilovolt transmission line in Australia. Both underground and overhead transmission lines have extremely low bushfire risk.

The Standing Committee on State Development’s 2023 inquiry on the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects received evidence that the risk of a bushfire being ignited by high voltage transmission lines is low. For example, in the 18 July 2023 hearing of the inquiry, the former Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner Andrew Dyer stated “If you define high voltage transmission as being, say, 220 kV and higher, the risk of that igniting a fire is virtually zero”.

This is reflected in a report by Energy Safe Victoria on Electricity Transmission Lines – Bushfire Mitigation and Community Safety, which states that:

“Transmission lines, when managed and maintained properly, pose a very low risk of starting a fire. This is due to factors such as the height clearance between the transmission lines and the ground, as well as the managed vegetation beneath

the lines that runs for the length of the line” (page 4). “By comparison, distribution powerlines, which transport the electricity from substations to consumers, operate at lower voltages in the range of 230 volts to 66,000 volts. Distribution power lines cover a much larger geographical area and are much closer to the ground and to trees, increasing the likelihood of fires being ignited” (page 5).

EnergyCo carries out an assessment of hazards and risks to inform the environmental assessment and approval processes for transmission projects, including implementing any mitigation measures throughout construction and operation to minimise these risks, including bushfire risks.

Firefighting authorities have established processes to co-ordinate firefighting activities with network operators.

12. Given the potential insurance implications due to heightened fire risks, what discussions have you had with insurers about the viability and affordability of cover for landholders and communities around Renewable Energy Zones?

Answer:

12. The NSW Government is aware that concerns have been raised about the potential for landholders of properties neighbouring renewable energy developments needing to take out higher levels of third-party liability insurance due to the high value of the energy assets on the neighbouring land, and that taking out the additional insurance may be cost prohibitive.

EnergyCo has met with the Insurance Council of Australia, which has stated that insurers have not raised any specific concerns about neighbouring clean energy infrastructure, and that it is not aware of any instances where its members have been unable to provide insurance or have increased premiums as a result of a farm (or a neighbouring property) hosting energy infrastructure.

To date, neither the Clean Energy Council, the Insurance Council of Australia or EnergyCo have been presented with any cases where a farmer has had their premiums impacted or has been unable to access insurance due to their location near a renewable generation project.

Despite this, the NSW Government is working collaboratively with key stakeholders to explore and monitor the issue.

It is standard practice for public liability insurance to be approximately \$20 million across many different sectors. Both the Insurance Council of Australia and the Clean Energy Council have released information about this.

13. Are there any legal or planning protections being considered to ensure neighbouring landowners aren't financially penalised by increased insurance premiums directly resulting from proximity to REZ developments?

Answer:
13. Reimbursement for any increased insurance premiums levied to the neighbour as a result of any increases to the sum insured for public liability due to the presence of the development may be considered as part of a "Neighbour Agreement." These agreements can provide a commercial arrangement between the project and neighbour that recognises the potential impacts of the project on the neighbour for a renewable energy development.

14. What is the contingency plan if evidence emerges that large-scale renewable energy installations significantly increase bushfire risks or complicate firefighting operations?

Answer:
14. DPHI will respond to this question.

Financial Costs of REZ Projects

15. Can you provide a breakdown of the historical and projected financial costs associated with constructing and maintaining these large-scale renewable projects, including hidden or indirect costs typically overlooked in public communications?

Answer:
15. Please refer to the Australian Energy Regulator final determination which is due for release in July 2025.

16. What cost-benefit analyses have been conducted comparing these REZ projects against alternative energy generation methods, including traditional energy sources?

Answer:
16. Cost-benefit analyses were undertaken for the Hunter-Central Coast and Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure projects. These cost-benefit analyses used a model that considers the least-cost generation options across all types of electricity generation. The modelling considered a counterfactual of the REZ not proceeding, against scenarios in which the REZ proceeds.

17. Can you provide the cost benefit analysis reports to the committee

Answer:
17. A summary of the cost-benefit analyses for the Hunter-Central Coast and Central West Orana REZ network infrastructure projects is found in the Infrastructure Planner Recommendation Reports, which are available online at:

<https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/cwo-rez-public-report-infrastructure-planner-recommendation-may-2024.pdf> and https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-04/HCC%20REZ%20IPRR%20-%20Public%20Report_0.pdf.

Compensation for Residents and Shared Benefits

18. How does the government justify the adequacy of the compensation currently offered to landowners hosting transmission lines, particularly given ongoing and unknown impacts on property values and agricultural productivity?

Answer:

18. The NSW Government is committed to the acquisition process being fair, easy to understand and transparent. The key objectives of the governing legislation, the *NSW Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*, are to acquire land on just terms for the owner and to encourage acquisition by agreement. Accordingly, the government’s intention is to ensure landowners receive their full entitlement to compensation while ensuring the delivery of essential public infrastructure.

19. Could you explain the financial rationale behind the compensation scheme, how was it determined, and how regularly is this reviewed for fairness and economic accuracy?

Answer:

19. The *NSW Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* provides various heads of compensation, which includes landowners being fairly compensated for their costs incurred in receiving professional valuation and legal advice throughout the acquisition process.

In addition to compensation entitlements for land and easement acquisition under the *NSW Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*, private landowners hosting a transmission project will be eligible for an additional benefit sharing payment under the NSW Government’s Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme. The scheme entitles eligible landholders to \$200,000 per kilometre of transmission infrastructure hosted, paid annually over 20 years.

EnergyCo considered several factors in the \$200,000 rate per kilometre, including balancing the costs of payments to consumers with ensuring landowners receive a meaningful benefit. This rate also equates to about the same as the average compensation paid to landowners for the acquisition of easements for new transmission infrastructure under the *NSW Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*, noting this amount is tied to variable market value rates across NSW.

Payments made under the Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme would therefore result in an estimated ‘doubling’ of total monetary benefits paid to private landowners hosting new transmission infrastructure.

20.What measures are in place to ensure affected residents clearly understand the tax implications and long-term economic impacts of receiving compensation payments?

Answer:

20. The NSW *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* provides the framework to assess the landowner’s entitlement to compensation which includes a guarantee that compensation is not less than its market value as at the date it is acquired. Appropriately qualified independent valuers are engaged to assess compensation for all acquisition matters. Landholders are also entitled, and are strongly encouraged to obtain, their own valuation and legal advice from qualified professionals, and all reasonable fees and costs are reimbursed in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The NSW *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* was last reviewed in 2016 by the NSW Government in accordance with ‘Pratt and Russell Reviews’. A further review of the Act has recently been undertaken and is subject to the government’s consideration. Further information is available at <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/under-review-and-new-policy-and-legislation/land-acquisition-review>.

As noted in the response to question 19, the rate for Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme was developed with consideration to the average compensation paid to landholders under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*. Payments made under the Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme are indexed to inflation (using the CPI published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics) to ensure payments are not devalued in real terms over time.

As everyone’s personal tax circumstances are different, it is appropriate for recipients of compensation payments to discuss their individual tax arrangements and financial circumstances with a tax advisor or a certified accountant.

Management of Voluntary Planning Agreements

21. What specific accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure Local Government Areas (LGAs) receive equitable and adequate financial support through voluntary planning agreements related to Renewable Energy Zones?

Answer:

21. DPHI will respond to this question.
22.How does the government ensure these agreements genuinely reflect the socioeconomic disruption experienced by local communities?
Answer:
22. DPHI will respond to this question.

Supply and Demand of Materials and Human Resources

23.With so many renewable energy projects coming online, can you outline what materials are being sourced locally in NSW versus those being imported? Just in general terms, as each project differs.
<p>Answer:</p> <p>23. Long-term Energy Service operators report on locally sourced goods and services to the Scheme Financial Vehicle, who are the counterparty to Long-term Energy Service agreements.</p> <p>Under section 50(2) of the NSW <i>Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020</i>, to Long-term Energy Service operators are required to provide information annually to the Minister for Energy on the extent to which they are creating employment and supporting industry in NSW. The Minister provides a summary of this information in a report tabled in Parliament each year.</p> <p>The first of these reports is being finalised for publication. The reporting does not include renewable energy projects that are privately developed without a to Long-term Energy Service agreement or contracted by EnergyCo.</p>
<p>24.Has the government conducted a detailed economic analysis on how Renewable Energy Zones could impact local suppliers and manufacturers?</p> <p>a) What did it show?</p> <p>b) Can this be provided to the committee?</p>
<p>Answer:</p> <p>24. The NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board (the Board) commissioned detailed economic analysis to inform development of its plan for the renewable energy sector in NSW.</p> <p>a) The Board’s plan identified opportunities to develop NSW renewable energy supply chains, reflecting advantages in existing industry specialisation, reduced time to market and increased supply chain resilience.</p> <p>b) The Board’s Plan is available at https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/nsw-renewable-</p>

[energy-sector-board-plan.pdf](https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/consumer-costs-and-economic-benefits-for-renewable-energy-sector-boards-plan.pdf). The ACIL Allen's Consumer costs and economic benefits for Renewable Energy Sector Board's Plan is available at <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/consumer-costs-and-economic-benefits-for-renewable-energy-sector-boards-plan.pdf>.

25. Given our shared commitment to supporting local economies, what strategies have been implemented to prioritise and promote local NSW businesses within renewable energy supply chains?

Answer:

25. Under the *NSW Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*, the NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board is required to prepare a plan for the renewable energy sector. This was published in September 2022.

The plan includes minimum requirements and stretch goals for local content. The stretch goals signal the Board's ambition for the sector, anticipating the minimum requirements would move towards the stretch goals over time. The *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* and Regulations require the Minister, AEMO Services and EnergyCo to take into account the Board's plan when carrying out their functions.

The Board has developed a process to increase local content requirements over time, to provide greater certainty to businesses seeking to make investments in local supply chains for the renewable energy sector. For further information, visit <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities/sector-board>.

AEMO Services, as Consumer Trustee, runs tenders for Long-Term Energy Service agreements. Proponents tendering for Long-Term Energy Service agreements are assessed by AEMO Services against regional economic development criteria including the Board's minimum requirements for the use of local supply chain inputs, local steel, apprentices and for First Nations participation. Proponents exceeding the minimum requirements are awarded a higher score for their bid.

Tender documents on AEMO Services website include the criteria for assessment.

EnergyCo takes a similar approach in their tenders including for REZ access rights and network operators. Commitments made in the tenders become contractually binding for successful bids.

REZs provide considerable opportunity for local businesses to supply renewable and transmission projects – diversifying local economies that have traditionally been reliant on agricultural income. This diversification of income can help communities and families get through tough times such as drought.

Recently EnergyCo has been partnering with Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to deliver briefings and capacity building workshops in a range of locations to ensure local businesses are ready to engage and participate in opportunities in the REZ.

Additionally, EnergyCo has recently completed procurement for two pieces of work with Industry Capability Network to support local procurement within REZs:

- the NSW REZ topics page, which will create a dedicated platform specifically for REZs to showcase local businesses and link project opportunities for both buyers and suppliers
- the National Sector Directories where three sector directories of local businesses will be produced. The Power Transmission, Renewable Energy Generation and Storage and Circular Economy directories are in construction.

26.Are you aware of what proportion of steel, concrete, cabling, and specialised equipment used in NSW renewable projects is sourced from overseas, and how does this impact local employment and industries?

Answer:

26. DCCEEW is aware of the total local supply inputs, total local steel and workforce data such as number of local jobs and apprentices reported by Long-term Energy Service operators under section 50(2) of the NSW *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*. Information on the proportion of concrete, cabling and specialised equipment that is from overseas has not been provided.

The Central West Orana REZ transmission project has included local procurement targets within contract requirements which mandates a minimum level of engagement for local industry. This includes material procurement. such as steel, along with local industry participation during delivery and operational phases.

There are several materially significant components which are not produced domestically and as such are only available from overseas suppliers, however where available, consideration is made for locally sourced materials and equipment.

Long-term Energy Service operators can include other ways they are creating employment and supporting industry in their reports. The Minister for Energy provides a summary of this information in a report tabled in Parliament each year which should be a valuable resource on the creation of jobs and growth of local industries over time. The first of these reports is being finalised for publication. The report does not include renewable energy projects that are

privately developed without a Long-term Energy Service agreement or contracted by EnergyCo.

27.If offshore suppliers dominate these projects, how does the government plan to protect local manufacturers and suppliers from being economically disadvantaged?

Answer:

27. The NSW Government supports the Australian Government’s Anti-Dumping Commission which is investigating dumping and subsidised import claims that injure Australian industries.

The NSW *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* aims to create employment, including employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and promote local industry, manufacturing and jobs. The Act requires AEMO Services and EnergyCo to take into account the Renewable Energy Sector Board’s plan (referred to in question 25).

The Renewable Energy Sector Board has recommended minimum local content requirements which are consistent with Australia’s international trade obligations while providing local suppliers, including small and medium enterprises and First Nations suppliers, with full, fair and reasonable opportunities.

AEMO Services and EnergyCo have considered these recommended local content requirements in the tenders under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap. Proponents’ tender bids are assessed against the local content requirements and those exceeding the minimum are awarded a higher score for their bid.

The NSW Government is also providing up to \$275 million of funding through the Net Zero Manufacturing Initiative to accelerate innovation, expand local manufacturing capacity and improve supply chain resilience. This funding will support NSW businesses by increasing their competitiveness in the market. Further information about the initiative is at <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/business-and-industry/programs-grants-and-schemes/net-zero-manufacturing>.

28.Has the government set enforceable quotas or targets to guarantee a minimum level of local supply for renewable energy infrastructure projects? If not, why not?

Answer:

28. The NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board’s Plan (referred to in question 25 and 27) recommends minimum local content requirements which AEMO

Services and EnergyCo consider in tenders under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

Bids that exceed these minimum requirements are scored higher in the merit assessment for roadmap tenders. Proponents’ local content commitments are contractually binding under their Long-term Energy Service agreement and are monitored and enforced by the Scheme Financial Vehicle. EnergyCo monitors and enforces commitments made under their contracts.

Under the NSW *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*, to recommend the Renewable Energy Sector Board’s plan to the Minister for Energy for approval, the regulator, IPART, had to be satisfied that the plan was consistent with Australia’s trade obligations and protects the financial interests of electricity customers. Amendments to the Act last year now require IPART to also be satisfied the plan promotes social and economic benefits for the NSW community and economy.

Setting enforceable quotas or targets to guarantee a minimum level of local supply for privately-funded renewable energy infrastructure projects may be inconsistent with Australia’s trade obligations and increase costs for electricity customers.

29.Could you clarify how the government is monitoring whether renewable energy companies are genuinely sourcing locally, versus simply importing cheaper offshore materials?

Answer:

29. EnergyCo, as Infrastructure Planner for the Central West Orana REZ transmission project, maintains oversight over where its delivery partners are sourcing materials and equipment. This is part of the quality management and industry participation requirements of the project and is achieved through the review of purchasing documentation and procurement strategies.

Proponents’ local content commitments are contractually binding under their Long-term Energy Service agreements and are monitored and enforced by the Scheme Financial Vehicle. EnergyCo monitors and enforces commitments made under their contracts.

The Renewable Energy Sector Board monitors and reviews their plan and can make recommendations to the Minister for Energy about the implementation of the plan.

30.What specific incentives or programs has the government implemented to help NSW businesses become more competitive suppliers for these renewable projects?

Answer:

30. The NSW Government is providing up to \$275 million of funding through the Net Zero Manufacturing Initiative to accelerate innovation, expand local manufacturing capacity and improve supply chain resilience. Further information is available at <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/business-and-industry/programs-grants-and-schemes/net-zero-manufacturing>.

The NSW Government is briefing businesses on upcoming projects, procurement opportunities and processes to participate in the REZ delivery.

31. Are there mandatory local workforce targets in place for these renewable energy projects?

Answer:

31. The NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board’s Plan recommends a minimum of 20 per cent of all trades positions are apprentices and a minimum of 20 per cent of total project workforce are learning workers.

These requirements are considered by AEMO Services and EnergyCo in tenders under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

Bids that exceed these minimum requirements are scored higher in the merit assessment but are not excluded from consideration as local content is one of several criteria in the merit assessment.

32.How are these targets being enforced?

Answer:

32. Proponents’ local content commitments are contractually binding under their Long-term Energy Service agreements and are monitored and enforced by the Scheme Financial Vehicle. EnergyCo monitors and enforces commitments made under their contracts. Non-compliance requires proponents to submit a cure plan, which includes how and when non-compliance will be remedied, and the option to terminate the agreement.

33.Whenever one of these projects are advertised, generally reference to local jobs is up near the top of the flyer, yet we see an influx of people coming from abroad to work on them, which has a huge impact on housing demand, particularly in regional areas. We saw it in Mudgee for example, hundreds of posts on facebook groups for people looking for accommodation. What are you doing to combat this?

Answer:

33. EnergyCo is working closely with DPHI, which is responsible to assessing and determining suitable strategies for managing cumulative impacts of the REZs regarding housing supply and affordability. For many projects with a large

construction workforce, establishing self-contained temporary worker accommodation camps close to the project will be a requirement to reduce pressure on the local housing market.

DPHI is assisting with cumulative impact studies in the Central-West Orana and South West REZs to confirm the scale and timing of impacts from multiple renewable energy projects. These studies will provide evidence and recommendations for the NSW Government to support host communities through specific actions addressing infrastructure and service pressures. This includes issues like traffic and transport, housing and workforce accommodation, social infrastructure and services, water security and waste management.

In the Central-West Orana REZ, a number of initiatives are under investigation which will help provide long-term legacy housing and accommodation opportunities for REZ communities, including First Nations people, key workers and other groups. EnergyCo has recently provided \$11.25 million to Mid-Western Regional Council to build affordable housing in Mudgee for key workers and complete civil works that pave the way for additional homes. This funding was delivered through the Legacy Infrastructure Grants administered by EnergyCo, which utilises community benefits payments from renewable energy projects in the REZ.

Additionally, the NSW Government has sought to alleviate housing pressures by implementing planning reforms to support the delivery of construction worker accommodation within REZs. These reforms include local planning pathways for housing construction workers for renewable energy projects and ensuring appropriate construction, design, and safety standards for manufactured homes and relocatable homes apply to construction worker accommodation.

Impacts on Regional Visitation and Tourism

34.What studies have been conducted to assess potential negative impacts on regional tourism due to changes in visual landscapes and local amenity resulting from large-scale renewable projects?

Answers:

34. DPHI will respond to this question.

35.How does the government plan to balance regional tourism and visitation interests against the demands of expanding renewable infrastructure?

Answers:

35. DPHI will respond to this question.

Alternative Energy Sources

36.Has the government evaluated alternatives to traditional renewable energy projects, such as smaller-scale, modular nuclear reactors, carbon capture technologies, or hybrid energy models? If not, why?

Answer:
<p>36. Assessments of options for electricity supply, including modelling exercises, use CSIRO’s GenCost publication for cost inputs. GenCost is a collaboration between CSIRO and AEMO to deliver an annual process of updating the costs of electricity generation, energy storage and hydrogen production technologies with a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>GenCost represents Australia’s most comprehensive electricity generation cost projection report. It uses the best available information each cycle to provide an objective annual benchmark on cost projections and updates forecasts accordingly to guide decision making, given technology costs change each year.</p> <p>The 2024-25 GenCost Consultation Draft Report included integration costs associated with ensuring supply is reliable when using intermittent energy sources of renewable energy such as solar photovoltaic and wind, including storage, transmission, system security and spilled energy.</p> <p>Despite accounting for these additional costs, variable renewables remain the lowest of all new-build technology capable of supplying reliable electricity. Excluding high-emission generation options which are not consistent with Australia’s climate targets, the next most competitive generation technologies are solar thermal, gas with carbon capture and storage and large-scale nuclear.</p> <p>Modelling conducted or commissioned by DCCEEW and by AEMO for its Integrated System Plan include all alternative generation technologies in GenCost as build options, excluding nuclear, as NSW and Australian government legislation prohibits the construction or operation of nuclear facilities for non-research purposes. However, nuclear energy is costly when compared to the most economic form of new reliable generation, firmed renewables. Even if it was not prohibited, developing, planning, constructing and commissioning a nuclear power station is unlikely to occur before 2040.</p>

Adequacy of Community Consultation

37. How does the government assess the effectiveness of its community consultation processes, given persistent reports from rural communities of feeling excluded or inadequately informed?

Answer:
<p>37. EnergyCo often asks local communities and councils for feedback on how best to undertake community consultation and engagement.</p> <p>EnergyCo has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the effectiveness of its community consultation processes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a regular presence at regional events in response to feedback that EnergyCo lacks a visible presence in local communities compared to renewable energy developers • increasing its use of printed communication materials in response to feedback that communities have limited access to online information - this includes regular mailouts to 42,000 residences in the New England region via Australia Post • expanding advertising to include local community newspapers and radio stations in addition to regional media outlets • developing an online interactive map which includes the locations of proposed generation projects in the REZs, in response to feedback that communities would like a better understanding of proposed generation development in their area • holding targeted briefings at the request of local community groups, such as progress associations and rotary clubs, to better inform them about them about the REZs and what they mean for local communities. <p>Please also refer to question 38.</p>

38. What tangible measures or changes have been implemented in response to community feedback specifically critical of Renewable Energy Zone consultation?

Answer:
<p>38. EnergyCo often asks local communities and councils for feedback on how best to undertake community consultation and engagement.</p> <p>For example, in the preparation of the social impact management plan for the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone transmission project, EnergyCo asked the Community Reference Group, local Councils and the First Nations Working Group how best to engage with the local community and stakeholders to inform the preparation of this plan.</p> <p>As a result of this feedback, the consultation was scheduled for mid-February 2025 (after the school and holiday period, and important dates for the Aboriginal community), included specific workshops to suit the Aboriginal community and included a community information drop in session on Saturday in Dunedoo so more people could attend.</p>

These actions were taken in direct response to community and stakeholder feedback.

Decommissioning and Management of Bonds

39. In the event a renewable energy company goes bankrupt or otherwise abandons a project, what guarantees does the government have in place to ensure local communities and taxpayers won't bear the costs of decommissioning and site restoration?

Answer:

39. DPHI will respond to this question.

40. Have you studied cases from other regions or countries where renewable projects have ended their lifecycle, and if so, what lessons have you integrated into your decommissioning bond policies to prevent similar issues here in NSW?

Answer:

40. DPHI will respond to this question.

41. What mechanisms are in place to ensure First Nations voices are not just heard, but influence project outcomes, particularly where projects impact Country and cultural heritage?

Answer:

41. EnergyCo is ensuring that First Nations communities benefit through employment opportunities from the delivery of the REZs and coordinating enabling infrastructure to support the energy transition.

EnergyCo was instrumental in setting up and participating in three First Nations working groups. The first was the Central-West Orana Working Group and it was subsequently followed by the South West and Hunter-Central Coast Working Groups. Each working group meets monthly.

The working groups each have tailored First Nations Guidelines to ensure engagement and consultation is culturally appropriate and that content is community driven and relevant to the needs and opportunities of the Aboriginal people and businesses of that region.

42. "How many First Nations organisations or representatives have been involved in REZ planning committees, and what decision-making power have they been given?"

Answer:

42. The working groups referred to in question 41 provided representation from Aboriginal Stakeholders, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, NSW Aboriginal Land

Council, Aboriginal communities, along with representation from other NSW Government agencies.

The role of the working groups is to provide the link between community and project proponents in the REZs. Project proponents include transmission and distribution network operators as well as energy generation and storage projects.

The role of working groups includes providing a forum:

- to consult on and implement employment and income initiatives proposed in Aboriginal Participation Plans
- for government to engage with First Nations community regarding other work streams (for example, skills and training, First Nations business support).

They have no delegation or decision-making power.

43.“Can the Department detail any benefit-sharing or income/employment programs that have been implemented specifically for First Nations people under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap?”

Answer:

43. EnergyCo has facilitated the development and delivery of training workshops for First Nations stakeholders to support capacity building. EnergyCo has tailored the workshops to address the feedback from First Nations communities about the renewable energy transition, the potential benefits of the REZ and how First Nations communities can participate and secure these benefits.

The workshops will be delivered independent of government through the Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group within the University of NSW.

The workshops cover:

- the potential benefits of the REZ and how First Nations communities can participate and secure these benefits through the identification of jobs, training, and skills development and opportunities
- the exploration of a real-life clean energy project case study, including opportunities and benefits for First Nations groups
- information about opportunities for participation in the Central-West Orana REZ, from communities, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and not for profit Aboriginal organisations and support for developing an industry network to facilitate Aboriginal engagement and participation in Central-West Orana REZ.

Through these workshops EnergyCo has supported the First Nations working groups to ensure they have the right resourcing, in addition to developing a training workshop and micro skill course for First Nations communities.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development recently conducted Aboriginal Business and Procurement Capability Uplift workshops for local Aboriginal businesses to assist them prepare for procurement opportunities in the REZ. Further information should be sought from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

44.“The submission references First Nations guidelines – what monitoring or accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure developers comply with these guidelines?”

Answer:

44. The EnergyCo First Nations Outcome team will develop a framework that provides insight and monitoring of Aboriginal Participation Plans.

Under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap, all proponents are required to submit their Aboriginal Participation Plans for review and approval to AEMO and EnergyCo. Aboriginal Participation Plans must include REZ specific targets and, community aspirations for training and workforce development, directly from REZ specific First Nations guidelines.

45.“Has the Government considered co-management or land stewardship models with Traditional Owners as part of long-term REZ planning?”

Answer:

45. EnergyCo, along with the whole of government First Nations subcommittee, will continue to look at options for land activation and shared equity opportunities with our First Nations stakeholders in REZs.

Traditional owners are eligible for biodiversity stewardship agreement support through the Stewardship Support Program. The Stewardship Support Program works with landholders to establish biodiversity stewardship agreements in areas of high credit demand including REZ.

The government is exploring opportunities for Aboriginal people to contribute to the supply of biodiversity offsets for renewable energy projects in the REZ. This would include biodiversity stewardship agreements, where landholders are paid to manage and improve biodiversity. The government is considering other forms of conservation partnership with Aboriginal people under the Central-West Orana Conservation Investment Strategy.

46.“Are cultural heritage assessments led or approved by relevant Aboriginal Land Councils or Elders, and if not, why?”

Answer:

46. Under the NSW planning framework, cultural heritage assessments are required to include engagement with Aboriginal people who hold cultural

knowledge relevant to the area. This process is guided by the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Consultation Requirements for Proponents (DCCEEW 2010), which ensures that Aboriginal people are consulted early and throughout the assessment process.

While Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Elders may be consulted as part of this process, they are not formally designated as the approval authorities for cultural heritage assessments under current legislation.

Instead, the assessments are typically carried out by qualified heritage consultants in partnership with Registered Aboriginal Parties, which may include Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives, Elders or other culturally affiliated individuals or groups.

The final decisions and approvals for cultural heritage assessments for Critical State Significant Infrastructure, State Significant Infrastructure and State Significant Development sits with the consent authority which is DPHI. The final decisions and approvals are informed by consultation outcomes which typically includes input from Heritage NSW within DCCEEW.

47.Does the government keep any data on attitudes of communities to REZs, renewable energy projects and/or transmission projects that it could share with the committee?

Answer:

47. The NSW Government conducts quarterly sentiment tracking research in the five declared REZs to support program implementation and to provide insights to inform ongoing communications and engagement.

The sentiment tracking research is a deliverable under the Roadmap Steering Committee’s Whole of Government Implementation Plan. Two survey waves have been conducted to date, in December 2024 and April 2025. The survey is conducted through a combination of online and telephone surveys.

Community feedback is also considered when an environmental impact statement for a project is exhibited for community consultation.

48. Local Government NSW has recommended that councils be given the discretion to apply the Benefit Sharing Guidelines to any size project - what is the government’s view?

Answer:

48. DPHI will respond to this question.

49.How are the financial values in Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs) determined, and what measures are in place to ensure consistency across different LGAs and REZs?

Answer:
49. DPHI will respond to this question.

50.What specific changes have been implemented as a result of the Community Engagement Review for transmission projects, and how will their effectiveness be evaluated?

Answer:
<p>50. The Community Engagement Review Report, published by the Australian Government in February 2024, contained nine recommendations.</p> <p>A response to the Community Engagement Review Report was published by the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council in July 2024, which identified 172 existing and proposed actions across all jurisdictions to address the CER recommendations.</p> <p>The response identified 28 specific actions being progressed by the NSW Government that address the Community Engagement Review recommendations. Actions that have a particular focus on enhancing community engagement for transmission projects, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In June 2024 the NSW Government awarded the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW \$1.3 million in grant funding to expand its independent complaint handling services to community members impacted by renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects. In December 2024, both EnergyCo and ACERESZ became members of the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW, in line with recommendation five of the CER. The Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW has developed a targeted evaluation plan to monitor and continually improve the new services enabled by the grant. • In November 2024, DPHI published its Renewable Energy Planning Framework, which includes a Transmission Guideline. Section 4 of the Transmission Guideline focuses on community and stakeholder engagement and clarifies the expectation that effective and meaningful community engagement takes place in the development of any major transmission infrastructure. The Transmission Guideline also provides advice on a range of assessment issues that are often of concern for communities. • DCCEEW is currently working with the Australian Government and the other jurisdictions to develop a renewable energy developer rating scheme, in accordance with Community Engagement Review recommendation one. The proposed scheme is expected to include transmission network operators. <p>The Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council is monitoring the progress made by all jurisdictions to action the review’s recommendations. Refer to the attachment to these questions for further information.</p>

EnergyCo’s public consultation and engagement takes into consideration a range of existing legislative provisions, frameworks, and guidelines, including the Australian Government’s Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water’s National Guidelines for Community Engagement and Benefits for Transmission (August 2024).

EnergyCo is preparing to undertake sentiment tracking and better analysis of our interactions and feedback received from key audiences including landowners and impacted communities. EnergyCo will do this to better understand the effectiveness of its approach, the needs of each community within the REZs and how we can continue to improve.

51. How does the NSW Government balance land use conflicts between REZ infrastructure and high-value agricultural land under the current planning framework?

Answer:

51. The NSW Government including EnergyCo recognises the importance of managing potential land use conflicts between REZ infrastructure and high-value agricultural land. These considerations are addressed through several mechanisms:

- Planning and site selection: the development of REZs and associated infrastructure is informed by strategic planning processes that consider environmental, social, and economic factors, including existing land uses.
- Assessment under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*: infrastructure projects, including transmission projects in REZs, are subject to environmental impact assessment processes that require proponents to identify and assess potential impacts on agricultural land. High-value agricultural land is a consideration in site selection and routing for transmission infrastructure.
- Mitigation and management measures: where impacts on agricultural land are unavoidable, proponents (including NSW Government proponents) are typically required to implement measures to mitigate or manage these impacts. For example, proponents may be required to undertake steps to manage biosecurity risks to land directly impacted or adjacent to REZ transmission infrastructure.

52.To what extent are benefit-sharing payments being received by non-host neighbouring landowners, and how is fairness in distribution assessed and enforced?

Answer:

52. EnergyCo is investigating a policy for neighbouring non-host properties in response to Recommendation 52 of the Electricity Supply and Reliability Check Up.

53.How are cumulative environmental and social impacts assessed across multiple overlapping REZ developments, particularly in densely impacted LGAs?

Answer:

53. Projects submitted to DPHI for assessment under the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* are provided with Planning Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements which outline what must be addressed in the project's environmental impact statement (also required to be submitted prior to development approval). This includes key issues to address and key stakeholders to consult. Where relevant to the project, cumulative impact and socio-economic issues are identified as issues to address within the environmental impact statement, along with relevant stakeholders to consult.

For the New England REZ, a series of REZ-wide cumulative impact research studies have been undertaken across five priority topic areas. The studies seek to determine the baseline conditions across impacted local government areas and the estimated impact from REZ development (transmission infrastructure and generation projects) and identify potential opportunities to address the gaps. The studies were supported by a series of in-region consultation workshops including key stakeholder representation.

The studies underwent a period of agency review and feedback and are in the final stages of development. The studies provide a platform from which the NSW Government can identify, consider, prioritise and implement interventions applicable to each whole of government subcommittee.

In addition to these REZ-wide studies, environmental impact statements for each transmission and generation project within the REZ must include comprehensive cumulative impact assessments and social impact assessments, in accordance with established guidelines. These assessments are required to include consideration of the incremental and cumulative impacts of the project together with other developments in the region.

Where LGAs are impacted by multiple REZs, a centralised consultation approach is taken to reduce duplication and consultation fatigue.

54.Can the committee be provided with examples of how recent policy reforms have improved transparency and community trust in REZ rollout processes?

Answer:
<p>54. The NSW Government has been working closely with the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW to expand its functions so community members impacted by renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects can access independent complaint handling and dispute resolution services.</p> <p>In December 2024, both EnergyCo and ACEREZ became members of the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW.</p> <p>Since this time, the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW has been engaging with host communities across NSW to raise awareness of their new services, and to identify systemic issues which for communication back to government for consideration and action. Further information is available at www.ewon.com.au/page/customer-resources/renewable-energy-infrastructure.</p> <p>In 2024, DPHI released the Renewable Energy Planning Framework, which included new and updated planning assessment guidelines for new transmission infrastructure, solar and wind energy projects and guidelines for the hydrogen industry, benefit sharing and private agreements between proponents and landowners and neighbours. Further information about the framework is available at https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/renewable-energy.</p>

55. Witnesses from the Energy Corporation of NSW have mentioned the process of bringing community engagement back in-house: what performance metrics or community feedback will be used to assess whether this is more effective than contracting some roles through the project teams?

Answer:
<p>55. EnergyCo is analysing its interactions and feedback received from key audiences including landowners and impacted communities. EnergyCo will do this to better understand the effectiveness of its approach, the needs of each community within the REZs and how it can continue to improve.</p>

56.Can an example of a project proposal that was substantially altered by considerations of a biodiversity corridor be provided?

Answer:
<p>56. Well-sited projects can minimise impacts on the environment and result in lower biodiversity impacts and reduced offset obligations.</p> <p>All applicants are encouraged to minimise biodiversity impacts by designing a project to avoid biodiversity impacts where feasible, before mitigating and offsetting residual impacts. This may also be done during detailed design prior to</p>

lodging a development application or through the process after a development application has been lodged.

The approved Spicers Creek Wind Farm is located on a site that has been heavily disturbed by agricultural activity and is characterised predominantly by cleared land and was designed to minimise potential impacts, including locating turbines and associated infrastructure within areas of relatively low biodiversity values. The development footprint was reduced from 1,520 hectares at environmental impact statement exhibition to 1,470 hectares. The design of the project also focused largely on avoiding impacts to areas of Box Gum Woodland Critically Endangered Ecological Community.

For the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project, EnergyCo designed the project to avoid and minimise impacts on high quality vegetation and biodiversity as much as possible. Examples of project design elements and alterations made to consider biodiversity include:

- locating a large proportion of alignment along valley floors dominated by active coal mines and existing transmission lines, avoiding national parks and state forests
- replacing the proposed Uarbry energy hub with 330 kilovolt switching stations within the development footprints of the approved Liverpool Range Wind Farm and proposed Valley of the Winds Wind Farm projects
- replacing the alignment approved for Liverpool Range Wind Farm transmission connection through Durridgere Strategic Conservation Area with a shorter alignment, reducing impacts, with only one easement progressing within the state conservation areas - this was the preferred alignment option of the National Parks and Wildlife Service
- avoiding impacts to better condition remnant Box Gum woodland resulting in the larger proportion of impact being in derived native grassland, and a large proportion of the Box Gum Woodland impacted being low quality vegetation and grassland that did not generate biodiversity offsets
- avoiding impacts to larger more intact mapped areas of regent honeyeater habitat.

The Biodiversity Offsets Scheme requires proponents to take all reasonable measures to avoid impacts to biodiversity values. The proposed Bendemeer Solar Farm in the New England REZ is an example of where feedback from the NSW Government has resulted in the proponent proposing to amend the design to avoid a regional biodiversity corridor. The amended proposal is available on the NSW Government's Major Projects website.

57. When the planning system allows unlimited project submissions, how does the Department of Planning ensure transparency and prevent overload from speculative proposals?

Answer:

57. DPHI will respond to this question.

58. How will EnergyCo assess the success of community benefits programs over time? What KPIs are being used?

Answer:

58. In December 2023, EnergyCo executed a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to co-design and deliver four grant streams for the Central-West Orana REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program (the Program) in compliance with the NSW Grant Administration Guide.

The Service Level Agreement includes the provision of evaluation support for the Program. The evaluation framework (and related KPIs) are currently under development and will focus on outcomes that articulate the benefits expected to occur from EnergyCo’s investment in communities in line with the Community and Employment Benefit Program Policy Paper (refer to <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/cebp-policy-paper.pdf>).

In the short-term, a process evaluation (focusing on the Central-West Orana REZ program application stage) is already underway and will incorporate feedback from community organisations, successful and unsuccessful applicants, councils and EnergyCo engagement with communities.

EnergyCo is committed to a continuous improvement model and is already incorporating early feedback from the process evaluation and stakeholders to inform Stage 2 of the CWO REZ Program and the development of the Program in other REZs.

Attachment 1 to question 50. AEIC Community Engagement Review Recommendations – Implementation Update

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act (and regulations) Rec 1, 2	<p>The Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 (the EII Act) legislated the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (the Roadmap), which centralises much of the planning of electricity generation, storage and transmission projects in NSW, so a greater level of coordination and oversight over developers can be achieved.</p> <p>The EII Act also sets into NSW law key requirements for considering community inputs and delivering shared benefits in the rollout of the Roadmap.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Delivery of the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap is underway, and enough projects have been signed up to get NSW halfway to its renewable energy generation target.</p> <p>The Roadmap and its legislation will be reviewed periodically to ensure the best outcomes for the people of NSW.</p>
The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) Rec 1, 2	<p>Under Part 8 of the EII Act, IPART was appointed to the role a regulator of the Roadmap, and has the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare an annual report on how the consumer trustee, infrastructure planner, financial trustee and regulators are exercising their functions, • audit the performance of the consumer trustee, infrastructure planner, financial trustee and scheme financial vehicle, and • assess the Renewable Energy Sector Board Plan and make a recommendation to the Minister. <p>All distribution and transmission network service providers (DNSPs and TNSPs) are required to self-report to IPART to ensure compliance with the conditions of their licensing regime.</p> <p>IPART's role as a regulator of the Roadmap: ipart.nsw.gov.au/nsw-electricity-infrastructure-roadmap.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>IPART's role as a regulator of the Roadmap is ongoing. In October 2024, IPART published their third Roadmap Annual Report to the Minister for Energy, covering the 2023-34 financial year: ipart.nsw.gov.au/documents/annual-report/report-minister-roadmap-annual-report-october-2024</p>
NSW Planning Guidelines,	The NSW Government expects early, genuine and ongoing community engagement as part of the preparation of an	Completed - ongoing

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
<p>assessments and approvals</p> <p>Rec 1, 2, 4</p>	<p>Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for State development and environmental approval.</p> <p>The Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) for State Significant projects require project proponents to demonstrate how the engagements they have undertaken are consistent with the <i>Undertaking Engagement Guideline for State Significant Projects</i> published by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI).</p> <p>The Guideline can be found at planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/undertaking-engagement-guidelines-for-ssp.pdf.</p> <p>The NSW Government is currently finalising a suite of Guidelines as part of its Energy Policy Framework, to further clarify community engagement, impact mitigation, and benefit sharing expectations for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects. The Energy Policy Framework will also look to improve understanding of, and consistency in, the development assessment and approvals processes for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure in NSW.</p> <p>Information on the draft NSW Energy Policy Framework can be found at planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/renewable-energy/energy-policy-framework.</p> <p>To support the important work of NSW Planning in this space, the NSW Government has committed to increasing funding and resourcing for NSW planning assessments and approvals, and a more coordinated approach to cumulative impacts and biodiversity assessments.</p>	<p>In November 2024, the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) published the NSW Renewable Energy Planning Framework, which includes Guidelines for Large-Scale Solar Energy Projects, Wind Energy Projects, Transmission infrastructure, Private Agreements, and Benefit Sharing. The Framework can be found at: planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/renewable-energy/renewable-energy-planning-framework</p> <p>NSW DPHI continues to look for ways to streamline the planning and environmental approval processes, and improve guidance available to developers, landholders and communities.</p> <p>EnergyCo’s transmission infrastructure projects are subject to substantial legislated requirements under the EP&A Act, EII Act and EUA Act to seek for State development and environmental approvals.</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
REZ Access Schemes Rec 1, 2, 8, 9	<p>Access schemes are a key part of the NSW Government’s plan to coordinate and encourage renewable energy and storage investment in Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) under the Roadmap.</p> <p>Access schemes help to govern the volume and quality of projects that may be granted the right to connect to REZ network infrastructure and establish ongoing requirements.</p> <p>The NSW Consumer Trustee, or the Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo), assess REZ access scheme tenders against published merit criteria which include assessment of community engagement practices, tailored approaches to minimise impacts, community benefit commitments, regional economic development, and First Nations participation. Merit criteria also consider a project’s contribution to local economic development, including benefits for First Nations peoples.</p> <p>More information on the NSW REZ access schemes can be found at energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/access-schemes.</p>	<p>In progress</p> <p>The access rights tenders have now been completed for the Central West Orana REZ and the South-West REZ.</p> <p>In the Central West Orana REZ, ten renewable energy and storage projects have been granted access rights, with a total allocated capacity of 7.15 GW. For more information go to: energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/access-schemes/central-west-orana-access-scheme</p> <p>In the South-West REZ, four renewable energy and storage projects have been granted access rights, with a total allocated capacity of 3.56 GW. For more information go to: energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/access-schemes/south-west-rez-access-scheme</p> <p>EnergyCo is currently developing an access scheme for the New England REZ, which will include consulting with industry and communities as part of the process.</p>
Long Term Energy Service Agreements LTESA Rec 1, 2, 8, 9	<p>Long Term Energy Service Agreements (LTESAs) provide revenue certainty for private investment in new renewable energy generation, firming and long-duration storage, helping to secure efficient financing for project construction, bolstering investor confidence.</p> <p>The LTESA tender process is managed by the NSW Consumer Trustee who must consider an array of merit criteria when conducting, assessing, and making recommendations on LTESA applications, including:</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>AEMO Services Limited is currently running the sixth tender round for LTESAs in NSW under the Energy Infrastructure Roadmap. For more information go to: aemoservices.com.au/tenders</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECOMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement and consultation • Shared benefits for the local community • Land use considerations • Local supply chain development • Employment and workforce development. <p>The merit criteria used to assess LTESA tenders include consideration of a project's contribution to local economic development, including benefits for First Nations peoples. More information can be found in the Social Licence Commitments Market Briefing Note at: aemoservices.com.au/-/media/services/files/publications/market-briefing-series/231219-tender-round-3-outcomes-market-briefing-note.pdf?la=en.</p> <p>More information on NSW LTESAs can be found at: energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/long-term-energy-service-agreements.</p>	
High level land use mapping for Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) transmission corridors Rec 3	<p>The NSW Government conducts detailed land use mapping, supplemented by community engagement and on-ground assessments, to determine the preferred route, final easement corridors, and placement of towers for new major transmission infrastructure projects under the EII Act.</p> <p>Visit the Hunter Transmission Project webpages for an example of the corridor selection and refinement process, at: www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/projects/hunter-transmission-project#revised-corridor.</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>EnergyCo uses a combination of desktop analysis (including high level land use mapping), field investigations, and landowner and community engagement to identify, assess and refine transmission corridors for the REZs.</p> <p>This is an iterative and ongoing process throughout the planning approvals process. The route selection and refinement process is guided by the principles in NSW DPHI's Transmission Guidelines which can be found at: planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/transmission-guideline.pdf</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
		<p>EnergyCo is currently finalising the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Hunter Transmission Project. Details of the route selection process are outlined on EnergyCo’s website, and will be detailed in the EIS.</p> <p>For the New England REZ project, EnergyCo has adopted a number of planning principles to further guide the development of transmission corridors. The Scoping Report can be found at: majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=PDA-73912716%2120240729T214848.356%20GMT</p>
<p>Statewide geospatial mapping to inform REZ locations Rec 3</p>	<p>The NSW Government identified the indicative locations of the first three declared NSW REZs following a detailed state-wide geospatial mapping exercise in 2018, along with coordinated community consultation.</p> <p>This initial analysis sought to identify optimal locations to host renewable energy generation around the State, including areas with strong renewable energy resource potential, proximity to the existing electricity network and consideration of potential interactions with existing land uses.</p> <p>The Illawarra and Hunter Central Coast REZs followed similar processes.</p> <p>For more information visit: www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/renewable-energy-zones/renewable-energy-zone-locations.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>All five NSW REZs have been declared.</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
Independent review of transmission planning Rec 4	<p>The current policy settings in NSW for the delivery of a timely and cost-effective transition to renewable energy were recently reviewed.</p> <p>Out of this review, the NSW Government committed to facilitating an independent, expert review of current Transmission Planning arrangements in NSW to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and improving coordination between transmission planning entities.</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>The NSW Transmission Planning Review is currently underway led by an expert panel.</p> <p>Several rounds of stakeholder consultation have been completed, most recently in response to an Options Paper released in May 2025.</p> <p>An Interim Report is expected to be made public in June 2025 for stakeholder consultation. The Review is scheduled to conclude, with a final report to the NSW Minister for Energy, in mid-September 2025.</p> <p>For more information go to: energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/regulation-and-policy/nsw-transmission-planning-review-2025</p>
Independent complaint handling for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure developments Rec 5	<p>The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is developing an independent complaint handling function for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects.</p> <p>This initiative aims to improve community engagement by helping to address community complaints independently throughout the consultation and rollout phases of the projects across NSW.</p> <p>The new service will be a first point of contact for community members with concerns about renewable energy projects. It will connect them with the most appropriate channels to address their complaints. If residents remain unsatisfied with how their complaints are</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>In June 2024 the NSW government awarded the Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW (EWON) \$1.3 million in grant funding to expand its functions to provide independent complaint handling and dispute resolution services to communities and landholders impacted by transmission and renewable energy infrastructure projects.</p> <p>In December 2024, both EnergyCo and ACERZ became members of EWON.</p> <p>EWON is now providing a free, independent dispute resolution service for landholders and community members dissatisfied with</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECOMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
	handled by the relevant entities, the service can then investigate and work towards a resolution.	how their complaints are handled by EnergyCo or ACERREZ, as well as Transgrid who is already a member of EWON. For more information on EWON's services go to: ewon.com.au/
NSW Centre for Property Acquisition Rec 5	The NSW Centre for Property Acquisition helps communities across NSW understand the property acquisition process, provides affected people with access to support services, and works with acquiring authorities to promote fair, transparent and consistent practices throughout the compulsory acquisition process.	Ongoing The NSW Centre for Property Acquisition continues to support landholders navigating the compulsory acquisition process. For more information go to nsw.gov.au/housing-and-construction/property-acquisition/about-us
NSW Planning's complaints handling processes Rec 5	DPHI has an important role in complaints handling for projects going through the NSW Planning approvals process. DPHI works closely with impacted communities, local councils and other state and federal government agencies to investigate compliance complaints relating to State Significant Development and Infrastructure projects. More information on DPHI's compliance policy framework can be found at planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/compliance-policy.pdf	Completed, ongoing DPHI continues to work with communities, landholders and local councils to investigate compliance complaints on State Significant Developments and Infrastructure projects.
EnergyCo, delivery of REZs Rec 4, 6	The Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) is responsible for leading the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs). To ensure that the delivery of these REZs is as coordinated and efficient as possible, the NSW Government has committed to a detailed review of the Central-West Orana REZ network infrastructure project, once it has reached	Action underway EnergyCo continues to make progress in delivering NSW's five REZs. Access rights have been granted for generators to connect to two REZs, and the sixth tender for LTESAs is underway.

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
	<p>financial close, to identify faster decision-making opportunities for future projects.</p> <p>In delivering REZs, EnergyCo conducts extensive, targeted engagements with communities impacted by REZ infrastructure.</p> <p>Currently EnergyCo is seeking to strengthen its on-ground presence in the REZs and increase local recruitment. This includes establishing an office in Dubbo (in the Central-West Orana REZ) and another office in Armidale (in the New England REZ) later in the year.</p>	<p>EnergyCo has also awarded the first tranche of grants under Stage 1 of the Central-West Orana REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program. This announcement can be found at: energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-04/250411 - SHARPE MORIARTY - MR - COMMUNITY BENEFITS START FLOWING FOR CWO REZ_0.pdf</p>
<p>A broader public information campaign in NSW Rec 6</p>	<p>The NSW Government is currently developing a broad public information campaign in to build community understanding on the transformation of the energy system that is underway, and the benefits and opportunities created by the implementation of the NSW Roadmap.</p>	<p>Completed, ongoing</p> <p>New information on NSW’s electricity transition is now available and has been supported with a paid proactive media activity. Efforts are ongoing to enhance awareness and understanding in communities across NSW, with opportunities to build on existing information resources and communication channels being continually explored.</p> <p>For more information go to: energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-transition</p>
<p>NSW Net Zero Commission Rec 6, 7</p>	<p>Once created, the NSW Net Zero Commission, established in the newly legislated <i>Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023</i>, will be responsible for informing and educating the NSW Government, businesses, organisations, and individuals to promote action to address climate change.</p>	<p>Completed, ongoing</p> <p>In July 2024, Commissioners for the Net Zero Commission were appointed.</p> <p>In November 2024, the Net Zero Commission published its first Annual Report for the 2023-24 financial year. The report provides an initial assessment of progress towards the primary emissions targets and the adaptation objective established in the Act.</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
		This Report can be found at: netzerocommission.nsw.gov.au/2024-annual-report
EnergyCo Advisory Committee Rec 7	The EnergyCo Advisory Committee (EAC) provides governance oversight, specialist expert advice and assurance to support EnergyCo in performing its legislated functions.	Completed The EnergyCo Advisory Committee has now been replaced by the Energy Corporation of NSW Board legislated under the EUA Act, to further strengthen oversight and governance of EnergyCo's delivery of its responsibilities (see below).
NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap Steering Committee Rec 7	The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap Steering Committee (Roadmap Steer Co) is comprised of senior executives from a range of NSW government agencies and is responsible for coordinating the whole-of-government delivery of the Roadmap. The Roadmap Steer Co reports bi-annually to the Secretaries Board and, via the Minister for Energy, to the Strategy Committee of Cabinet.	Ongoing A whole-of-government Roadmap Steering Committee was established in early 2024, chaired by the Premier's Department, to coordinate implementation actions to support Roadmap delivery across government. Meetings commenced in February 2024. The Roadmap Steering Committee has finalised a whole-of-government implementation plan with agencies committed to actions that will address challenges and enable successful delivery of the Roadmap. The implementation plan will be updated regularly to inform Government of progress on these important actions. The Premier's Department has established Subcommittees under the Roadmap Steering Committee, including for Transport, First Nations, Housing, Communications, Skills & Workforce and Local Content. The Roadmap SteerCo reports bi-annually to the Secretaries Board and, via the Minister for Energy, to the Strategy Committee of Cabinet. The last report was in March 2025.

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
Energy Corporation of NSW Board Rec 7	EnergyCo Board is in the process of being established. The Board's main functions will be to determine the policies of EnergyCo and give directions to the EnergyCo Chief Executive Officer in relation to priorities and functions.	Completed, ongoing The Energy Corporation of NSW Board has been established under legislation in the Energy and Utilities Administration Act (EUA Act) and on 1 July 2024, the Minister for Energy announced the appointment of a chairperson and seven members independent to Government after a rigorous selection process. The Board is supported and informed by a number of specialist Committees.
Energy Oversight Committee Rec 7	The Energy Oversight Committee involves senior executives from the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, the Environment, Energy and Water (DCCEEW), the NSW DCCEEW, and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) to discuss key energy transition projects and issues.	Ongoing The Energy Oversight Committee continues to meet monthly to discuss key energy transition projects and issues.
First Nations Outcomes team Rec 8, 9	EnergyCo has established a First Nations Outcomes team, with dedicated staff to coordinate consultation, engagement and implementation of programs and initiatives that deliver outcomes to local Aboriginal communities under the EII Act. The team specifically looks at promoting employment, training and income generating opportunities for Aboriginal communities in the REZs.	Ongoing
First Nations Guidelines Rec 8, 9	The NSW First Nations Guidelines set out the expectations for consultation and negotiation with local Aboriginal communities and their aspirations for increasing employment and income opportunities in the construction and operation of new electricity infrastructure projects in New South Wales, delivered under the Roadmap. The NSW First Nations Guidelines come in two parts.	In Progress The department has completed a review of the general First Nations Guidelines to ensure it continues to meet community expectations and state priorities. A revised general First Nations Guidelines was published in May 2025.

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The general Guidelines provide information about best practice engagement and negotiation with local Aboriginal communities. They outline factors which decision makers are required to take into account when exercising key functions under the EII Act related to Roadmap projects. The region-specific Guidelines outline the local Aboriginal communities' goals and aspirations for income and employment opportunities, as well as their preferred method of engagement with Roadmap project proponents and Government. <p>More information on the NSW First Nations Guidelines can be found at: www.energy.nsw.gov.au</p>	<p>The department is developing the region-specific Guidelines for New England with local Aboriginal communities. Following publication of the New England First Nations Guidelines, the department will commence development of the Illawarra First Nations Guidelines.</p> <p>The First Nations Guidelines and the available region-specific guidelines can be found at: energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/first-nations</p>
REZ First Nations Working Groups Rec 8, 9	<p>Working Groups for each NSW REZ have been established consisting of local Aboriginal community representatives from each of REZ areas. These representatives include Elders and knowledge-holders from Aboriginal community groups and other organisations that provide support and services to the various Aboriginal communities within that region.</p> <p>The Working Groups have been established for the purposes of contributing to the development and co-design of the region-specific First Nations Guidelines, to ensure they reflect the economic aspirations of the local communities</p>	Completed, ongoing
REZ Community and Employment Benefit Sharing Schemes	<p>On 15 July 2024, the Community and Employment Benefit Program was announced by the Minister for Energy and four grant streams were launched in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). The Program provides</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>On 11 April 2025, the Minister for Energy announced that \$60 million has been awarded through Stage 1 of the Central-West Orana REZ</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECOMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
Rec 8, 9	<p>the framework for how EnergyCo administers funds received as components of access fees for community and employment purposes and is key to EnergyCo’s work to meet the EII Act objects to foster community support for investment in new generation, storage, network and related infrastructure (EII Acts 3(1)d)).</p> <p>The Program will invest hundreds of millions of dollars to share the benefits of the renewable energy transition and ensure the long term prosperity of regional communities. The Program will continue to operate and deliver benefits for many years after the REZ are delivered, ensuring impacted communities are left better off than they were before.</p> <p>One aim of EnergyCo’s Community and Employment Benefit Program is to increase the capacity of First Nations organisations and provide additional services and infrastructure support to First Nations peoples. The NSW Government is also exploring opportunities to enhance benefits for impacted communities that are not within a declared REZ.</p>	<p>Community and Employment Benefit Program. The announcement can be found at: energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-04/250411-SHARPE MORIARTY-MR-COMMUNITY BENEFITS START FLOWING FOR CWO REZ_0.pdf</p> <p>Funding has been awarded to grant recipients under three grant streams: the Local Community Fund, the Local Community Small Grants Fund and the Legacy Infrastructure Fund. First Nation Fund grants will be awarded in Q3 2025.</p> <p>EnergyCo worked with communities within the Central-West Orana region to ensure the program reflects regional priorities, as per the Consultation Feedback Report published in July 2024. This Consultation Feedback Report can be found at: energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/cebp-cwo-rez-consultation-feedback-report.pdf</p>
NSW Transmission Acceleration Facility Rec 8, 9	The NSW Transmission Acceleration Facility will enable Community Benefit Sharing Scheme projects to be funded prior to REZ infrastructure being built and access rights fees being secured, enabling tangible benefits to be delivered for communities before the construction of the REZ infrastructure is completed.	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>The Transmission Acceleration Facility continues to speed up the delivery of new transmission projects by funding early works in the REZs, including upfront funding for community and employment benefit schemes prior to recovery from access fees.</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECOMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board Rec 8, 9	<p>The NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board is established under the EII Act, and consists of representatives from workers unions, the steel, electricity and manufacturing sectors, the renewable energy industry, and electricity customers.</p> <p>The 2022 NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board Plan sets out the Board’s recommendations for fostering local supply chains for goods and services and workforce development. This includes but is not limited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing barriers for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and First Nations businesses, particularly in regional areas • Coordinating skills and workforce development in the REZs • Improving employment and economic participation opportunities for underrepresented groups <p>More information on the NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board Plan can be found at energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/nsw-renewable-energy-sector-board-plan.pdf</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>The Renewable Energy Sector Board continues to make sure local workers, communities, and industries share in the economic benefits of the transition to a more affordable, clean and reliable electricity system. For more information go to: energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities-and#renewable-energy-sector-board</p> <p>Most recently, in September 2024, the Board published its Review of the Board’s plan and recommendations to the Minister about implementation of the plan. This Review can be found at: energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/Review of the RES Board’s plan - September 2024.pdf</p>
Electricity Infrastructure Jobs Advocate Rec 8, 9	<p>The Electricity Infrastructure Jobs Advocate is an independent statutory office established under the EII Act, to provide advice to the NSW Minister for Energy on strategies to encourage investment, workforce development, employment and education and training opportunities in the energy sector in NSW.</p> <p>The Job’s Advocate’s Nov 2022 report can be found at: energy.nsw.gov.au</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>In June 2023, the Electricity Infrastructure Jobs Advocate published its second report to the Minister for Energy. In July 2024, the NSW Government published its Response and supported all six of the Jobs Advocate’s recommendations.</p> <p>These Reports can be found at: energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities-and#renewable-energy-sector-board</p>

Action and related recommendation/s	Summary as of 19 July 2024, as published by ECMC	Implementation Update – June 2025
		roadmap/roadmap-entities-and#-electricity-infrastructure-jobs-advocate-
Benefit-Sharing Guideline Rec 8, 9	A Benefit-Sharing Guideline will be included in the NSW Energy Policy Framework being finalised by DPHI, which sets out the NSW Government’s benefit sharing expectations for developers, to streamline planning processes and improve outcomes for impacted communities.	<p>Completed</p> <p>The Benefit-Sharing Guideline was published in November 2024 under DPHI’s Renewable Energy Planning Framework and provides advice on how benefit-sharing can be incorporated into the consideration and delivery of large-scale renewable energy development.</p> <p>The Guideline aims to ensure that communities in and outside REZs benefit from renewable energy development in their regions and that the benefits will be proportionate to the amount and scale of development.</p> <p>The Guideline can be found at: planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/benefit-sharing-guideline.pdf </p>
Regional investment through transmission Infrastructure development Rec 8, 9	Opportunities to deliver broader lasting benefits for communities and regions (including upgrades to roads, housing, and telecommunications) are considered as part of all major transmission infrastructure projects in NSW.	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>EnergyCo’s community and employment benefits scheme enables communities and councils to apply for funding supporting ongoing benefits. EnergyCo’s procurement of network operator contracts also include considerations for lasting benefits and upgrades for communities.</p> <p>The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap Intergovernmental Steering Committee also considers how NSW Government agencies can support broader benefits in their support of Roadmap delivery.</p>

