

Committee on  
Environment and Planning



LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY

## The electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024



Report 2/58 – June 2025

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The motto of the coat of arms for the state of New South Wales is "Orta recens quam pura nites". It is written in Latin and means "newly risen, how brightly you shine".

# Contents

Membership	iv
Chair's foreword	v
Findings and recommendations	ix
<b>Chapter One – The electricity outages emergency affecting Far West NSW</b>	<b>1</b>
Background to the region of Broken Hill and Far West NSW	1
Overview of the electricity system	3
The electricity outages emergency	6
<b>Chapter Two – The impact of the outages on the community</b>	<b>11</b>
Health and wellbeing, particularly mental health, of communities and individuals	12
Personal care, everyday life and household finances	14
Business and industry in the region	17
Impact on residents living in isolated or remote locations, Aboriginal communities and vulnerable community members	21
<b>Chapter Three – Energy resilience and reliability in Far West NSW</b>	<b>27</b>
The reliability and effectiveness of existing redundancy strategies for Far West NSW	27
The regulatory framework for electricity	31
Long-term strategies to improve reliability and resilience of the Far West electricity system	38
<b>Chapter Four – Emergency management in the Far West</b>	<b>45</b>
The roles and responsibilities of state and local government in the electricity outages emergency	45
Response to and management of the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency	48
Issues with emergency response and management for the Far West Region	51
The need for local education, expertise and engagement on emergency management	57
The critical importance of reliable mobile telecommunications	58
Emergency preparedness of local emergency services organisations and key service delivery agencies	60
Emergency support and management for Life Support Customers and other vulnerable residents	63
<b>Chapter Five – Communications with the community during the emergency</b>	<b>69</b>
Communication strategies regarding the status of power supply and the emergency response	69
The need for tailored communication strategies for remote, rural and regional communities like the Far West	78
<b>Chapter Six – Support for affected communities</b>	<b>83</b>
The importance of strong community networks in the Far West region	83
Support provided by businesses and non-government and community organisations	85

The role of community hubs during emergencies _____	87
Support provided by government agencies for the communities' long-term recovery from the outages _____	89
<b>Appendix One – Terms of reference _____</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry _____</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appendix Three – Site visit report _____</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix Four – Submissions _____</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix Five – Witnesses and town hall participants _____</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Appendix Six – Extracts from minutes _____</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Appendix Seven – Glossary _____</b>	<b>139</b>



## Figures

Figure 1: Map of Broken Hill Supply Area	5
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## Explainers and case studies

What is 'generation', 'transmission' and 'distribution' in the electricity system?	3
Case study 1: Rita, who relies on a CPAP machine, experienced considerable distress as a result of the outage	13
Case study 2: How the heat impacted Emma McLean and her young family during the emergency	16
Case study 3: The costs of food spoilage for Rhonda Hynch's community	16
Case study 4: How the outages impacted Rebecca Young's small business	20
Case study 5: How Rena Callow was left isolated by the emergency	25
Case study 6: The particular hardships faced by Wilcannia pensioner, William Murray	25
What is meant by 'redundancy' in energy regulation?	29
What is 'load shedding'?	31
An overview of energy regulation in NSW	32
What is a 'major incident' under IPART's Incident Reporting Manual?	36
Why and how is a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) done?	39
What are Generator Performance Standards (GPS)?	41
What are the different committees under the NSW emergency response and recovery framework?	46
What is the difference between the 'response' and 'recovery' phase of an emergency?	48
What is the NSW Public Safety Network (PSN)?	61
Case study 7: The Far West Local Health District's emergency plans and preparation arrangements	62
Case study 8: The impact of losing power for Leroy Johnson, a home dialysis patient	67
What is the role of the Public Information Services Functional Area (PISFA) under the NSW emergency management framework?	69

# Membership

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## Chair's foreword

Imagine going to bed one night with all being fine, only to wake in the morning with no electricity, no telecommunications and limited ability to access information that might explain what on earth was going on.

For some, this frightening saga started when their medical life support machines simply shut down, in the dark of the night, not long before midnight on 16 October 2024.

This is the real-life experience of communities in Far West NSW following a severe storm, hundreds of kilometres away, that wiped out the one and only electricity transmission line that serves the people of Broken Hill, most of the Central Darling Shire and a large part of the Far West Unincorporated Area of NSW.

This report tells of that story.

Electricity supply is, without doubt, fundamental to much of our society and lifestyle. And as the Committee heard during this inquiry, where go telecommunications and mobile devices must also go electricity supply.

Far West NSW, from Broken Hill to the Queensland border, receives its electricity supply by a single transmission line that runs from Buronga on the NSW-Victoria border.

A wild storm late in the night on 16 October caused seven transmission line towers to fall to the ground, thus terminating electricity supply. Clearly, this wasn't going to be a simple fix.

The company that is responsible for the transmission of electricity into Broken Hill is called Transgrid and they are required to have a backup plan for electricity supply, should an event like this occur. That backup plan, in this instance, involves 2 diesel-fuelled gas fired turbine generators that together should supply enough electricity until the transmission lines can be repaired.

But on the night of 16 October, unknown to almost everyone, one of those turbines was offline and undergoing significant repair. And, as for the other turbine that was online, the following days would demonstrate that it too was not in the best of condition and it was simply unable to cope with the demands being put on it.

So, starting on 17 October, the communities of the Far West woke up in one of two states of electricity supply: for most in the town of Broken Hill, supply had been restored thanks to the single generator that had been started – but, for other communities outside of Broken Hill, they were without power.

What also started on 17 October was a failure of telecommunications towers due to their various backup systems, designed to continue operations should electricity supply cease, failing to meet their purpose.

Hence, it was the 17 October when many communities, large distances from Broken Hill, began to live a reality of even more isolation and remoteness than their geography already imposed.

On that same day, various NSW Government agencies stood up their emergency response teams, as did the Central Darling Shire Council. So too did Transgrid and the local electricity distributor, Essential Energy.

Throughout the inquiry it was difficult to understand exactly what was known within Broken Hill, who had their electricity supply restored, and what was the situation being experienced in the other Far West communities hundreds of kilometres away, particularly in that first 24 hours. And with mobile and wireless telecommunications lost, it was clearly difficult to have that information shared or explained.

Soon petrol supplies became scarce. Depending on the system being used by each individual petrol station, and whether or not a generator was on hand, determined whether the supply was available, or not.

So, no power, no phones, no internet, and no fuel. And no idea that one of the diesel fuelled gas turbine generators was unavailable.

In a dark irony, efforts were made to share information about the situation (that is, the loss of power and telecommunications) by way of website updates and text messages, both of which require power and telecommunications connectivity. This irony was not limited to the first day. It became the standard information sharing protocol over the ensuing weeks – despite the obvious shortcomings.

In October 2024, with electricity and telecommunications cut off, the people of the Far West needed communication strategies that reflected the 1980s. Sadly, those responsible for communicating simply couldn't shift their thinking away from 2024.

The intention of our inquiry was to hear directly from the affected communities about their experiences during that time. We could not have foreshadowed the diversity of events, the seclusion that consumed entire communities, the barriers to a coordinated response that was suddenly imposed upon everyone, and the scale of the impact that was instantly imposed once the electricity supply ceased and the telecommunications outage that followed soon after.

Based on what the Committee heard, it is my view that at the very root of the community concern, was the simple desire to have timely and accurate information provided to them, so that they could understand and plan. This desire was not met.

For the Far West community that endured this experience, the Committee heard loud and clear that a door-knock approach, letterbox drop, or even a community noticeboard in a town centre would have been far more effective than many of the information sharing approaches used by corporate and government agencies at the time.

In the days and weeks that followed the initial power outage, electricity supply was restored intermittently, in a way that was largely unpredictable for most. This made a simple decision, like 'should I try to restock my fridge?' or 'should I start my home dialysis treatment cycle?' impossible to make. The Committee heard that the electricity surges that came with power coming on, or going off, damaged some household electrical items for which there appears to be no compensation.

Telecommunications were temporarily restored with the supply and connection of various small portable diesel-fuelled generators at various mobile tower sites. But then, thinking that 'normal' electricity supply had been restored, not realising that it was intermittent and



unreliable in nature, those same generators were soon removed. When power went out yet again, those same generators had to be returned to site and reinstalled.

One thing that was clearly difficult for the community to understand was why local electricity generation options, including an existing wind farm, an existing solar farm and an existing large-scale battery, could not be used to supply power locally. In short, this was due to both commercial interests and strict electricity network rules. This needs to be looked at and resolved before any future outage occurs.

The Committee had the great privilege of travelling across the Far West to hear directly from communities. We travelled from Broken Hill out to Menindee then up to Tibooburra, across to White Cliffs, down to Wilcannia and back to Broken Hill. We held public hearings with individuals and small community groups and we held open-door town hall meetings for anyone that wanted to appear. The willingness to share personal experiences, from all that engaged with us, adds a rich layer to this report.

We learnt that communities showed incredible resilience and care for one another. Many of the clever solutions to the problems at hand were devised and delivered from within. People checked-in on one another, shared what food they had and pieced together whatever information they had gleaned. Some rewired electricity boxes so that small local generators could be installed, others went to the trouble of refilling small generators on site at medical facilities and others organised for satellite internet systems to be made available to the wider community.

Businesses and industry were not spared from the impacts. Refrigerated stock was lost if backup generators were not on hand. Operations were shut down leading to loss of trade. Workers lost income with no shifts available. Production ceased. Business owners used various means to understand stock resilience and restocking options. Others slept on site to refill their own private generators that were keeping fridges on. And services were scaled back, if and where they could be delivered at all.

Government agencies and private operations did their very best to continue to deliver some services and to check on those that they knew to be most vulnerable. Emergency Management Committees convened by the NSW Government and local councils worked tirelessly to have an impact wherever they could. Local clubs opened their doors and offered a cool environment as well as free tea and coffee, not to mention somewhere to charge small appliances. Whenever assistance could be offered, it was offered in generous and selfless spirit.

The Far West power and telecommunications outage did bring to light the gaping holes in the lines of responsibility. Once, the entirety of electricity supply was a government responsibility. This included generation, transmission and distribution. But, following many years of privatisation, as this inquiry found, the owner of real responsibility in an event like this, now, is as difficult to hold as a wet piece of soap in a hot spa. And yet, despite no longer being directly responsible, as this event unfolded, the community at large did in fact turn to the Government to pick up the pieces and provide a safety net of services. This is an entirely unsatisfactory outcome. Taxpayers should not be footing the bill for the interventions that were required in this instance.

At the same time as this parliamentary inquiry was underway, two other inquiries have also been taking place. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) and the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) are largely responsible for enforcing the rules and operations

of the electricity network and the subsequent expectations around service reliability. These inquiries will be very technical in nature and may result in legal action or other direct commercial ramifications. It is the understanding of this Committee that these two inquiries are ongoing, and one would hope that some form of accountability is served.

As Chair of this Committee, it has been my absolute pleasure to work through this inquiry with a fantastic team of fellow committee members and parliamentary committee staff. Our journey to reach those far-flung communities was essential to our gaining a fuller understanding of how this event directly affected people and communities. But, most of it all, it has been brilliant to work with the community and to do our best to walk in your shoes, see with your eyes and experience this event through your heart.

**Clayton Barr MP**

Chair



# Findings and recommendations

## **Finding 1**\_\_\_\_\_ **9**

Although some of Telstra's telecommunications transmission towers in the Far West region had reserve power, these reserves were not enough to operate these towers for the prolonged periods without mains power. As a result, residents across the region who relied on telecommunications services from Telstra experienced substantial periods of telecommunications outages, particularly those living outside Broken Hill. Significantly, this meant that many communities had periods of time where they could not call emergency services.

## **Finding 2**\_\_\_\_\_ **11**

The electricity outages emergency affecting Far West NSW from 17 October 2024, and the resulting telecommunications outages, had far-reaching and serious impacts on communities across the region beyond the significant economic losses to individuals and businesses. The unstable power supply had hazardous health implications for many residents with chronic health conditions, and the uncertainty around access to power and telecommunications, including emergency services, had significant mental health impacts. These impacts were exacerbated by the geographical isolation of the region, particularly for those community members living in outlying towns and remote stations outside Broken Hill.

## **Finding 3**\_\_\_\_\_ **14**

Several residents across Far West NSW reported that, during the emergency period with unstable power supply, voltage fluctuations and spikes caused permanent damage to electrical appliances, particularly essential white goods like refrigerators. Some residents in the outlying towns like Wilcannia have not been able to replace these appliances and were still without fridges close to six months after the emergency.

## **Finding 4**\_\_\_\_\_ **21**

The residents outside of Broken Hill were impacted differently to residents in Broken Hill. As a result, downstream customers living in the smaller, more isolated towns or on remote stations outside Broken Hill experienced longer periods of power outages and had different access to electricity supply than those residents in Broken Hill.

## **Finding 5**\_\_\_\_\_ **27**

The electricity system in Far West NSW has particular vulnerabilities when it comes to energy reliability, due to the region's geographical isolation and its dependence on a single transmission line connection to the National Electricity Market. As a result, the region's residents experience power outages and disruptions more often than the general NSW population, particularly for communities outside of Broken Hill.

**Finding 6** \_\_\_\_\_ **27**

The risks to the critical electricity infrastructure in the Far West region of NSW is likely to increase as extreme weather events and natural disasters occur more often. Given the grid's vulnerability, the Far West region needs long-term redundancy arrangements in place. These arrangements should be regularly assessed and updated as needed, to ensure energy reliability for the grid.

**Finding 7** \_\_\_\_\_ **29**

Transgrid's interim redundancy arrangements, which relied on the operation of their two diesel-fuelled gas turbine generators, failed to meet the community's reasonable expectations for the performance of their transmission network.

**Finding 8** \_\_\_\_\_ **33**

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW is currently investigating any potential breaches of Transgrid's licence conditions and/or its regulatory obligations under the NSW regulatory framework. Separately, the Australian Energy Regulator is currently also conducting an investigation into the outages from 17 October 2024 to determine whether there were any potential breaches of the National Electricity Rules. As a result, any questions regarding compliance or non-compliance with regulatory obligations and licences will be determined by these investigations.

**Recommendation 1** \_\_\_\_\_ **34**

That the NSW Government consider amending the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* to provide the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) the enforcement power to order a network operator to compensate affected downstream customers, where IPART is satisfied that the operator has contravened a condition of its licence.

**Finding 9** \_\_\_\_\_ **35**

Transgrid failed to notify any government agency, regulator, relevant Emergency Management Committee, local government or downstream customer that one of their two gas turbine generators was offline before the storm event which led to the transmission outage in October 2024. This failure had consequences for the emergency response and the community's preparedness for the outages.

**Finding 10** \_\_\_\_\_ **35**

There is no clear legal obligation for Transgrid to proactively inform any regulatory or government body regarding the decision made to take one of the gas turbine generators offline.



**Recommendation 2** 36

That the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) update the *Incident Reporting – Electricity Networks Reporting Manual* to require network operators to:

- Give notification of a 'major incident' to, in addition to the Minister's office, any relevant Emergency Management Committees for the area affected by the incident, and
- Impose requirements to report to IPART and any relevant Emergency Management Committees of any business or operational decision that may impact the effective implementation of the operator's 'safety management system', even if that impact is temporary.

**Finding 11** 38

Approved through a rigorous regulatory investment test and approvals process, the novel Hydrostor Silver City A-CAES project is intended to strengthen the overall reliability of the Far West electricity system once completed in approximately late 2028. However, given the existing vulnerability of the grid, the region should not be reliant on any single source of backup power for adequate redundancy in the event the grid is disconnected from the National Electricity Market.

**Finding 12** 40

The Far West region has several existing alternative energy generation and storage providers. However, due to the existing Generator Performance Standards of these assets, these projects cannot be operated to support the grid when it is islanded.

**Recommendation 3** 40

That the NSW Minister for Energy, through the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, advocate to the Australian Energy Market Operator to consider possible changes to the Generator Performance Standards for the AGL and Tilt Renewable assets in the Far West region which would permit the operation of those assets when in islanded mode.

**Finding 13** 42

When power outages affect the remote towns in the Far West region of NSW outside of Broken Hill, the residents of these towns face greater periods without power as their geographical isolation present additional challenges to repairing faults to their power supply. These residents would benefit from establishing 'microgrids' in their towns to provide them with an independent source of backup power, to minimise the time periods they are without power while faults are being addressed.

**Recommendation 4** 42

That the NSW Government continue to investigate options for facilitating and supporting the establishment of 'microgrids' for the towns in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area. This could include supporting applications or applying to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency's Regional Microgrids Program for funding to establish renewable energy-powered microgrids in the remote towns in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area, particularly to support the Aboriginal communities in the region.

**Finding 14** 51

In some instances, there was significant time between the start of the electricity outages emergency and the delivery of emergency support, including small generators. Such delays may reflect a lack of urgency from relevant agencies involved in emergency management immediately following the storms and resulting damage to the transmission infrastructure on 17 October 2024 and during the initial stages of the emergency. This may indicate a lack of understanding of the additional challenges to emergency management in a remote area like the Far West region.

**Recommendation 5** 51

That the NSW Government consider incorporating guidance in the State Emergency Management Plan and the NSW Recovery Plan which addresses the unique characteristics of geographically isolated and sparsely populated regions like Far West NSW in coordinating and managing any emergency response and recovery.

**Finding 15** 53

Stakeholders highlighted several issues regarding the response and management of the electricity emergency, including general confusion about agencies' roles and responsibilities, confusing or poor communications, a lack of local knowledge reflected in the response and inadequate local representation on relevant Emergency Management Committees.

**Recommendation 6** 53

That the NSW Government, led by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water, support the development or update of Local and Regional Emergency Management Plans for Broken Hill, Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area, which:

- sets out an emergency management plan for each population centre outside Broken Hill,
- identifies an electricity supply emergency and its resulting impact on telecommunications as a relevant hazard, and
- outlines relevant risk controls and Consequence Management Guides to deal with an electricity supply emergency and its impacts on telecommunications.

**Finding 16** 55

The concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the emergency response to and management of the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency mirror the emergency management issues identified by the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's report entitled 'Independent Review into the 2023 Mass Fish Deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee'.

**Recommendation 7** 55

That the NSW Government, as a matter of priority, implement recommendation 3 of the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's report entitled 'Independent Review into the 2023 Mass Fish Deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee' to cover a broader range of hazards for the Far West region of NSW, particularly electricity and telecommunication outages.

**Recommendation 8** \_\_\_\_\_ **57**

That the NSW Government consider issuing guidelines on the operation and membership of Regional and Local Emergency Management Committees and include specific guidance on ensuring appropriate local representation on these committees that reflects the unique characteristics of each distinct population centre in a region or local government area. In particular, for committees in communities with high representation of Aboriginal people such as Wilcannia and Menindee, these guidelines should set out requirements for ensuring the committee's permanent membership has appropriate levels of local Aboriginal representation

**Recommendation 9** \_\_\_\_\_ **58**

That the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government to consider introducing regulatory requirements on carriers to ensure critical telecommunications infrastructure installations have backup power reserves that can provide a prescribed minimum backup power period. The minimum backup power period prescribed should be tailored based on the characteristics of the local government area or region and should factor in the geographical distance and context for the area.

**Recommendation 10** \_\_\_\_\_ **60**

That the NSW Telco Authority continue to support the roll out of the Critical Communications Enhancement Program and to ensure that, once completed, the Public Safety Network's full coverage includes coverage for the significant population centres in the Unincorporated Area and Central Darling Shire.

**Recommendation 11** \_\_\_\_\_ **61**

That the NSW Government consider reviewing all local emergency service organisations and key Aboriginal and essential services agencies in the Far West region to determine whether they have adequate backup arrangements in the event of an electricity outage and its related impacts on telecommunications, and provide support to implement appropriate backup arrangements as needed.

**Recommendation 12** \_\_\_\_\_ **61**

That the NSW Government provide support to the relevant Local and Regional Emergency Management Committees in the Far West region of NSW to conduct exercises for electricity outages and its related impacts on telecommunications.

**Recommendation 13** \_\_\_\_\_ **63**

That the NSW Government explore potential legislative amendments to health information protection laws to clarify when critical health information can be shared during an emergency without first seeking consent of the relevant patient. These amendments should make clear that this information should be shared with relevant government and non-government organisations involved in the emergency response, where that information is needed to protect the health, safety or life of individuals.

**Recommendation 14** \_\_\_\_\_ **63**

That, in addition to recommendation 13, the NSW Privacy Commissioner publish guidance as a matter of urgency clarifying when, under existing NSW laws, healthcare and service providers can share with energy providers the health information of patients dependent on life support machines and other medical electrical devices during a significant electricity outage.

**Finding 17** \_\_\_\_\_ **66**

In order to be recognised as a Life Support Customer under the National Energy Customer Framework, it falls on individual energy customers to register with their electricity retailer and provide written confirmation. This process is unlikely to capture all vulnerable individuals with serious chronic health conditions and disabilities, and this poses risks for these individuals given the more frequent planned and unplanned power outages in Far West NSW.

**Finding 18** \_\_\_\_\_ **66**

Agencies which deliver essential services are likely to have more up-to-date internal records about local residents who are vulnerable in an emergency or crisis. In particular, health service providers may have more holistic and complete records of individuals who require urgent support in an emergency, like patients who rely on medical devices or energy for other critical health reasons.

**Recommendation 15** \_\_\_\_\_ **66**

That the NSW Government consider supporting the Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee to establish a register identifying vulnerable local residents in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area and setting out their contact details. This register should be developed and maintained through consultation with local service providers and employees of NSW Health, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Police Force.

**Finding 19** \_\_\_\_\_ **74**

The communications strategies by government agencies, local councils, and energy service providers to deliver messaging and information to the affected communities during the electricity outages emergency were often ineffective. These strategies heavily relied on digital and mobile communication and did not adequately consider the limited efficacy of these communications due to telecommunications outages caused by prolonged mains power outages.

**Recommendation 16** \_\_\_\_\_ **74**

That the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water publish the report on the After Action Review of the electricity supply emergency from October 2024. This report should include a review of the communication strategies by government agencies, emergency services organisations and local government to deliver information to the community during the emergency.

**Recommendation 17** \_\_\_\_\_ **78**

That the NSW State Emergency Management Committee consider amending the Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan or developing a Regional Public Information Sub Plan which provides guidance for developing local communication protocols to inform and update remote, rural and regional communities during an emergency while ensuring that any protocol is tailored for their local community, involves local expertise, and factors in strategies for communicating during a telecommunications outage.



**Recommendation 18** \_\_\_\_\_ **78**

That the NSW Government support the Local and Regional Emergency Management Committees for the Far West region to develop a protocol for communicating emergency response and management information with affected communities, which takes into account the distinct context and characteristics of each town in the region. This protocol should be developed in consultation with local representatives from key government agencies and emergency services organisations, local government, key community representative bodies and locally-based non-government organisations, local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and local media outlets.

**Finding 20** \_\_\_\_\_ **83**

Strong community networks were essential during the outages emergency, as affected residents were able to rely on their communities for support. Residents often relied on other community members and organisations to obtain information, and these community members and organisations were often the only people checking in on their wellbeing.

**Recommendation 19** \_\_\_\_\_ **87**

That the NSW Government review any applicable Emergency Management Plans and Recovery Plans for the Broken Hill and Far West region of NSW and consider including explicit recognition of the role of local community hubs, particularly local clubs and businesses, in emergency response and recovery.

**Recommendation 20** \_\_\_\_\_ **92**

That the NSW Government consider utilising any unclaimed grant funding administered by Service NSW for residents of Far West NSW to provide additional financial support for vulnerable communities affected by the 2024 electricity outages emergency to aid their recovery and improve resilience.



# Chapter One – The electricity outages emergency affecting Far West NSW

## Background to the region of Broken Hill and Far West NSW

- 1.1 Broken Hill and the Far West region cover approximately 147,000 km<sup>2</sup> of western New South Wales,<sup>1</sup> and has a population of 19,876.<sup>2</sup> 22.8 per cent of the region's residents are aged 65 years or older,<sup>3</sup> and 953 residents are NDIS participants.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.2 Broken Hill is located 1,143 km west of Sydney and 511 km north-east of Adelaide. The region is characterised as a whole by geographical isolation, which is compounded by the vast distances between towns outside Broken Hill that are classified as very remote Australia.<sup>5</sup> Tibooburra, the region's northern-most town, is located a further 335 km from Broken Hill.
- 1.3 The Barkandji and Wangkamara peoples are the Traditional Owners of the lands forming the region. 12.1 per cent of the region's population identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>6</sup> For Wilcannia, a town north-east of Broken Hill, that increases to 61.8 per cent of residents,<sup>7</sup> and for Menindee, a town south-east of Broken Hill, 41.8 per cent of residents identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.4 The region is administered by two Local Government Areas (LGAs): Broken Hill and Central Darling Shire. The Broken Hill City Council incorporates Broken Hill, in which 88 per cent of the region's residents reside.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.5 The Central Darling Shire Council includes Wilcannia, Menindee, Ivanhoe, Tilpa, White Cliffs, and Sunset Strip.<sup>10</sup> The Central Darling Shire is the largest LGA in NSW by area and has a population of fewer than 2,000 residents. The Council has been under administration since 2013.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.6 The Central Darling and Broken Hill LGAs are ranked in the highest 10 per cent and 20 per cent respectively of all Australian LGAs for socio-economic

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<sup>1</sup> [Submission 19](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, p 1. Defined as Broken Hill and Far West (Statistical Area Level 3), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3](#), viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>2</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill and Far West](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [Submission 12](#), National Disability Services, p 4.

<sup>5</sup> ABS, [Remoteness Areas](#), ASGS Edition 3, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill and Far West](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>7</sup> ABS, [Wilcannia \(L\)](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>8</sup> ABS, [Menindee \(L\)](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>9</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Central Darling Shire Council, [Your Council](#), viewed 21 May 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Minister for Local Government (NSW), 'Local Government Act 1993 – Order under Section 438I' in NSW, [Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales](#), No 179, 23 September 2013, 5983,p 5987.

disadvantage.<sup>12</sup> The median weekly household income for the region is \$1,166, which is \$663 less than the state median for New South Wales.<sup>13</sup>

- 1.7 Broken Hill, the region's economic centre, is situated on a zinc-lead-silver ore deposit with distinct mining leases each operated by Perilya Limited ('Perilya') and Coolabah Metals Limited.<sup>14</sup> Mining contributes \$1,426 million to the region's gross regional product,<sup>15</sup> and directly employs 6.7 per cent of the region's employed people.<sup>16</sup>
- 1.8 Separately, in the Central Darling Shire, White Cliffs is located on an opal field, attracting miners and fossickers.<sup>17</sup> Hospitals, aged care residential services and other social welfare services employ a combined 14.3 per cent of the region's employed people to serve the ageing population.<sup>18</sup>
- 1.9 The townships of Silverton, Tibooburra, Packsaddle, Milparinka, and Little Topar are situated in the approximately 93,000 km<sup>2</sup> area of Unincorporated Far West NSW (the 'Unincorporated Area'). The Unincorporated Area accounts for the majority of the region's agricultural output, with pastoral land used for grazing sheep and cattle.<sup>19</sup>
- 1.10 Because the Unincorporated Area does not have a local government,<sup>20</sup> these towns cannot generate income from rates and charges.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, they have no paid staff to deliver municipal services or advocate for upgrades for their community.<sup>22</sup> Silverton and Tibooburra have village committees administered by volunteers,<sup>23</sup> and residents are responsible for typical municipal services like waste management and planning. For example, in Tibooburra, residents operate the water treatment plant.<sup>24</sup>
- 1.11 The Committee heard from residents outside of Broken Hill about how the isolation of the region impacts service delivery for their communities. Essential

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<sup>12</sup> ABS, [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia](#), 2021, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>13</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill and Far West](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025; ABS, [New South Wales](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 21 May 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Geoscience Australia, [Geoscience Australia Portal](#), viewed 5 May 2025; Perilya, [Perilya homepage](#), viewed 5 May 2025; Coolabah Metals, [Coolabah Metals homepage](#), viewed 5 May 2025. Note: at the time of the outage, the Coolabah Metals Rasp mine was operated by CBH Resources Limited.

<sup>15</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 2.

<sup>16</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill and Far West](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Destination NSW, [White Cliffs & surrounds - Accommodation, things to do & more](#), viewed 21 May 2025.

<sup>18</sup> ABS, [Broken Hill and Far West](#), 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>19</sup> NSW Department of Primary Industries, [Agriculture Industry Snapshot for Planning Far West Sub Region](#), August 2020, pp 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 5; Phylis Ainsworth, Tibooburra and District Progress Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 5; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, 26 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Regional Development Australia Far West ('RDA Far West'), p 1.

<sup>22</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 5; Michael Williams, Chief Executive Officer and Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>24</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, p 2.



goods and services have to be sourced from Broken Hill,<sup>25</sup> which for residents of Tibooburra is an eight hour round trip.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Tibooburra only receives one freight service a week.<sup>27</sup> When roads are flooded, Silverton and Tibooburra can be cut off from accessing Broken Hill.<sup>28</sup>

## Overview of the electricity system

### The National Electricity Market (NEM)

- 1.12 The National Electricity Market (NEM) is the integrated electricity wholesale market and network providing electricity to consumers in New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. Consumers purchase electricity services from retailers operating in the wholesale market through a secondary retail market.<sup>29</sup>
- 1.13 The electricity system has three components that enable electricity to be produced and delivered to consumers: generation, transmission, and distribution.<sup>30</sup> The NEM facilitates this exchange through a wholesale market where generators sell electricity to retailers, and a retail market where retailers sell electricity to consumers.<sup>31</sup>

#### What is 'generation', 'transmission' and 'distribution' in the electricity system?

Generation refers to the production of electricity. Generators convert energy from sources including coal, wind, solar, hydropower, and gas into electricity.<sup>32</sup> Generators include power stations, renewable energy plants and embedded units.<sup>33</sup> Large-scale generators deliver electricity in bulk to transmission networks.

Transmission refers to the delivery of electricity at high voltages between generators and distributors. Transmission Network Service Providers build, operate and maintain transmission networks which link generators to distribution networks.<sup>34</sup> Electricity is transmitted through the transmission network at high voltages (66 kV-500 kV) enabling the electricity to be delivered across long distances whilst reducing energy loss in the system.<sup>35</sup> The electricity is delivered to a bulk supply point where the transmission network connects to the distribution network at a lower voltage (11 kV-132 kV).<sup>36</sup>

Distribution refers to the delivery of electricity from transmission networks, through distribution networks, to consumers. Distribution Network Service Providers build, operate and maintain distribution networks.<sup>37</sup> Voltage is progressively lowered at substations throughout the distribution system and supplies retail customers like households with electricity.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 10; Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>26</sup> Emma McLean, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 16.

<sup>27</sup> Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Murray, Secretary, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 25.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), [Retail](#), viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>30</sup> [Submission 24](#), Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART), pp 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), [Market operations](#), viewed 5 May 2025.

<sup>32</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 7.

<sup>33</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 7; AEMC, [Electricity Supply Chain](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>34</sup> AEMC, [Electricity Supply Chain](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>35</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 7; AEMO, [Regional Boundaries for the National Electricity Market](#), December 2024, viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Transgrid, [Transmission Planning Annual Report 2024: New South Wales](#), pp 136-145.

<sup>37</sup> AEMC, [Electricity Supply Chain](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Essential Energy, [Asset Management: Distribution Annual Planning Report 2024](#), 20 December 2024, pp 13, 15.

- 1.14 The high costs of transmission and distribution mean that Network Service Providers (NSPs) generally have a monopoly.<sup>39</sup> For example, each region of the NEM has a sole regional Transmission Network Service Provider (TNSP). Transgrid is the regional TNSP for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.<sup>40</sup>
- 1.15 There are three Distribution Network Service Providers (DNSPs) in New South Wales: Ausgrid, Endeavor Energy, and Essential Energy,<sup>41</sup> each operating in a defined distribution district.<sup>42</sup> Consumers do not have choice in their NSPs because this is determined by their distribution district and NEM region.<sup>43</sup>
- 1.16 However, the Committee notes that the traditional structure of the electricity network is evolving. The CSIRO and Energy Networks Australia predict that by 2050, 30 to 45 per cent of electricity will be generated by distributed energy resources owned by consumers.<sup>44</sup> These resources can be embedded into the distribution network, with consumers providing electricity to the grid and can also include solar, wind turbines, batteries, gas turbines, and diesel generators connected directly to the distribution network.<sup>45</sup>

**The Broken Hill Supply Area, which supplies electricity to the region<sup>46</sup>**

- 1.17 The Broken Hill Supply Area is the distribution system connecting consumers in the Broken Hill and Far West region to the transmission network and NEM.<sup>47</sup> All towns in the region are connected to this system, with the exception of Ivanhoe and Tilpa which are part of other supply areas.<sup>48</sup> Essential Energy, a state-owned corporation, is the DNSP for the Broken Hill Supply Area.<sup>49</sup>
- 1.18 The Broken Hill supply area is connected to the NEM by a single transmission line, known as 'Line X2', which is a 220 kV transmission line operated by Transgrid. The line starts at the Bungonia Substation and ends at the Broken Hill Substation, which is approximately 260 km long.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> AEMC, [Network regulation](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Australian Energy Regulator (AER), [2024 Electricity and gas networks performance report](#), September 2024, p 13.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> [Electricity Supply Act 1995](#) s 83.

<sup>43</sup> AER, [Our role](#), viewed 6 May 2024.

<sup>44</sup> CSIRO and Energy Networks Australia, [Electricity Network Transformation Roadmap: Final Report](#), April 2017, p i.

<sup>45</sup> AEMC, [Distributed energy resources](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

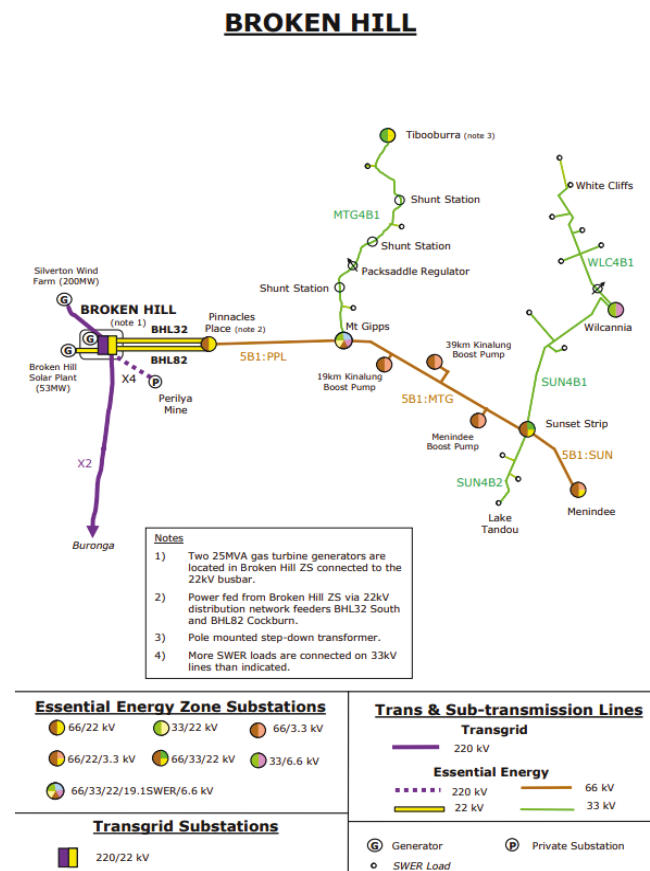
<sup>46</sup> As configured before the October 2024 outage.

<sup>47</sup> Essential Energy, [Asset Management: Distribution Annual Planning Report 2024](#), 20 December 2024, pp 51-52.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp 83-84.

<sup>49</sup> [Submission 33](#), Essential Energy, pp 1, 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> [Submission 28](#), Transgrid, pp 4-5.



**Figure 1: Map of Broken Hill Supply Area**

Source: [Submission 33](#), Essential Energy, p 5.

- 1.19 Line X2 is currently the only source of electricity supply sold to consumers, including households and businesses, in the Broken Hill and Far West region.<sup>51</sup> Transgrid's Broken Hill Substation is the sole bulk supply point delivering electricity from the transmission network to the Broken Hill Supply Area. The substation reduces the 220 kV transmission voltage to 22 kV for distribution.<sup>52</sup>
- 1.20 From the Broken Hill Substation, 22 kV overhead feeders supply electricity for distribution to consumers in Broken Hill and Silvertown and to Essential Energy's Pinnacles Place Substation.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Essential Energy delivers electricity to the Perilya Mine through a 220 kV transmission line (Line X5).<sup>54</sup>
- 1.21 At the Pinnacles Place Substation, voltage is increased to 66 kV for delivery to substations in Mt Gipps and Sunset Strip, and for distribution to consumers in Menindee. A 33 kV line connects the Sunset Strip Substation to consumers in Sunset Strip, Little Topar, Wilcannia and White Cliffs.<sup>55</sup> A 290 km long, 33 kV line connects the Mt Gipps Substation to consumers in Packsaddle, Milparinka, and

<sup>51</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 5.

<sup>52</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 5.

<sup>53</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 5; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Essential Energy, 28 March 2025, p 11; Essential Energy, [Network Information Portal](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

<sup>54</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 5.

<sup>55</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 5; [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 11; Essential Energy, [Network Information Portal](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

Tibooburra. This 33 kV distribution system was constructed in the early 1990s under the Far West Electrification Scheme, which was partially funded by landowner contributions, connected towns and pastoral properties.<sup>56</sup>

### Other electricity assets in the region

- 1.22 The region produces renewable energy to the NEM.<sup>57</sup> Tilt Renewables generates electricity through their 200 MW Silverton Wind Farm and 53 MW Broken Hill Solar Farm.<sup>58</sup> The wind farm is connected to the Broken Hill Substation via a 220 kV transmission line (Line X6), and the solar farm via a 22 kV line.<sup>59</sup>
- 1.23 AGL operates the 50 MW/50 MWh Broken Hill Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), which has been connected to the NEM via a 22 kV line to the Broken Hill Substation since August 2024.<sup>60</sup> The BESS provides electricity to the grid by charging during daytime periods of excess solar power and discharging during the evening peak.<sup>61</sup>
- 1.24 Transgrid also has two 25 MVA diesel-fired gas turbine generators at the Broken Hill Substation, which was acquired in June 2022 from Essential Energy.<sup>62</sup> These generators were commissioned in the early 1980s to provide backup electricity supply in the event of an outage.<sup>63</sup> Transgrid's purchase and use of these gas turbine generators as backup power supply as well as issues regarding the inability to operate the BESS and renewable energy farms during the outages emergency is discussed in Chapter Three.

## The electricity outages emergency

### Electricity outages

- 1.25 Near midnight on Wednesday 16 October 2024, a severe thunderstorm caused seven transmission towers along Line X2 to collapse, disconnecting the Broken Hill supply area from the NEM.<sup>64</sup> The storm also damaged two other towers along a 3.5 km section of the transmission line approximately 50 km south of Broken Hill.<sup>65</sup>
- 1.26 This resulted in a power outage affecting 12,700 properties in the region,<sup>66</sup> which had to depend on backup generation until connection to the NEM was restored on 31 October 2024. During this period, communities experienced continued and

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<sup>56</sup> [Submission 20](#), Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD), p 1; [Answers to questions](#), RDA Far West, p 3.

<sup>57</sup> [Submission 15](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 9.

<sup>58</sup> [Submission 25](#), Tilt Renewables, p 1.

<sup>59</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 4; [Submission 33](#), p 5.

<sup>60</sup> [Submission 29](#), AGL, pp 1, 3; [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), AGL, 28 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>61</sup> [Answers to questions](#), AGL, p 2.

<sup>62</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 5; [Submission 33](#), p 5; Transgrid, [Transgrid – Broken Hill Gas Turbine Transmission Ring Fencing Waiver Application](#), 17 January 2024, viewed 21 May 2025, p 1.

<sup>63</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 5.

<sup>64</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 7; [Submission 15](#), p 9; [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), IPART, 3 April 2025, p 2.

<sup>65</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 7; [Submission 24](#), p 21; [Submission 33](#), p 1.

<sup>66</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 6.



intermittent disruptions to power supply.<sup>67</sup> As discussed in further detail in Chapter Two, the impact of the outages was not uniform across the region. Different communities, and even different customers, had no power for varying amounts of time between 17 and 31 October 2024.<sup>68</sup>

- 1.27 Although DCCEEW provided a high level timeline of power disruptions across the region, overall the Committee received inconsistent evidence on when outages and power system events occurred. In setting out the relevant events during the electricity outages period, the times provided below are approximations.
- 1.28 Early Thursday 17 October, within two hours of the failure of Line X2, Transgrid started one of their gas turbine generators, 'GT2'.<sup>69</sup> Power was restored to customers progressively throughout the day.<sup>70</sup> By 4 pm that day, power was restored to all customers in Broken Hill.<sup>71</sup>
- 1.29 Initially during the transmission outage, Essential Energy detected a fault on the 66 kV line between the Mount Gipps and Sunset Strip substations, resulting in a further outage to communities in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area. The fault was identified on a power pole 20 km from the nearest sealed road and both the remoteness and the wet and boggy ground conditions made vehicle access difficult to repair the fault.<sup>72</sup> This damage was repaired by Essential Energy on Friday 18 October. As a result, power was restored to customers in Menindee, White Cliffs, Tibooburra, Wilcannia, and surrounding areas by 7 pm that evening.<sup>73</sup>
- 1.30 On Sunday 20 October, Transgrid published a Facebook post about a planned outage for the region that evening to maintain the performance of GT2.<sup>74</sup> The generator was disconnected at 11 pm and expected to be returned to service at 5 am on Monday 21 October. However, power was not restored to all customers until 11 am that morning.<sup>75</sup>
- 1.31 At 4 pm on Monday 21 October, GT2 tripped because of a fire suppression system fault. This resulted in another outage affecting all customers in the region. GT2 returned to service at 5 pm the following day, Tuesday 22 October.<sup>76</sup> However, power was progressively restored and was not restored for all customers until 6 am on Wednesday 23 October.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 2.

<sup>68</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 8.

<sup>69</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 8; [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>70</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>71</sup> [Additional document](#), Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water (DCCEEW), *Spreadsheet detailing the outages for specific areas*, 13 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>72</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, pp 2-4.

<sup>73</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, pp 2-4; [Submission 35](#), p 6; DCCEEW, [Spreadsheet detailing the outages for specific areas](#), p 2.

<sup>74</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 22.

<sup>75</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>76</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 8; [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>77</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6; DCCEEW, [Spreadsheet detailing total hours of customer impact](#), p 6.

- 1.32 From Tuesday 22 October, Transgrid, Essential Energy and the NSW Government installed generators at the Pinnacles Place Substation.<sup>78</sup> This enabled a temporary microgrid to supply electricity to customers in Wilcannia, Menindee, White Cliffs, Tibooburra and surrounding communities.<sup>79</sup> The microgrid commenced service on Thursday 24 October, with the first customers receiving power after 6pm that day.<sup>80</sup> The establishment of the microgrid protected communities outside Broken Hill from further outages of the generator and reduced the load on GT2.<sup>81</sup>
- 1.33 Electricity supply to these communities was briefly interrupted at 5 pm, Thursday 24 October as the power supply was switched from the Broken Hill network to the Pinnacles Place generators. There was also a brief interruption at 9 pm when the generators tripped, however power was quickly restored.<sup>82</sup>
- 1.34 At around 1.20 am, Friday 25 October, GT2 was disconnected to enable Transgrid to replace the generator's fuel forwarding pump.<sup>83</sup> This outage affected customers in Broken Hill until midday when power was restored.<sup>84</sup>
- 1.35 After agreement was reached between Transgrid and AGL, the BESS was reconnected to the islanded grid at around 4.50 pm on Saturday 26 October.<sup>85</sup>
- 1.36 The Pinnacles Place generator shut down at 8 pm on Monday 28 October for two hours, and again at 7 pm on Tuesday 29 October for one hour. This resulted in power interruptions to the remote communities connected to the microgrid.<sup>86</sup>
- 1.37 Transgrid began installing temporary transmission towers on Wednesday October 23. At around 6 pm on Thursday 31 October, Transgrid reenergised Line X2.<sup>87</sup> Following a brief power interruption to enable the reconnection, the Broken Hill Supply Area was reconnected to the NEM shortly after 9 pm.<sup>88</sup>
- 1.38 Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid confirmed that there was ongoing work to replace the temporary towers with permanent structures, to be completed by mid this year.<sup>89</sup> On 12 May, Transgrid announced that the Broken Hill Supply Area switched over to these new permanent sections of transmission line over the weekend of 9 and 10 May. During this switch, the region was temporarily on backup power supplied by both gas turbine generators.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 8; [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>79</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 2.

<sup>80</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 4.

<sup>81</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 1.

<sup>82</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6; DCCEEW, [Spreadsheet detailing the outages for specific areas](#), p 8.

<sup>83</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 8.

<sup>84</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>85</sup> [Submission 29](#), p 4.

<sup>86</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 7; DCCEEW, [Spreadsheet detailing the outages for specific areas](#), pp 11-12.

<sup>87</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 9.

<sup>88</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 7.

<sup>89</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 78.

<sup>90</sup> Transgrid, [Transgrid safely energises new permanent section of Broken Hill transmission line](#), media release, 12 May 2025, viewed 16 May 2025.

- 1.39 Customers in the Far West region also experienced other power interruptions, including due to problems with the network. From 18 to 24 October, Essential Energy undertook daily load shedding under direction from Transgrid because the backup generator did not have sufficient power to meet peak customer demand.<sup>91</sup>

## Telecommunications outages

### Finding 1

**Although some of Telstra's telecommunications transmission towers in the Far West region had reserve power, these reserves were not enough to operate these towers for the prolonged periods without mains power. As a result, residents across the region who relied on telecommunications services from Telstra experienced substantial periods of telecommunications outages, particularly those living outside Broken Hill. Significantly, this meant that many communities had periods of time where they could not call emergency services.**

- 1.40 Telstra reported that the October electricity outages affected 32 of their network sites, including 18 mobile sites and 14 exchange sites.<sup>92</sup> 3,930 Telstra fixed line and NBN services were affected.<sup>93</sup> The Committee notes that Telstra is the sole provider of mobile services in the communities surrounding Broken Hill.<sup>94</sup>
- 1.41 Telstra told us that they recognise that their national network is exposed to the hazard of power outages. To prevent telecommunications outages, Telstra sites are installed with backup power systems. The length of time a system can operate for depends on the site's requirements, and batteries are installed to ensure continuity of service during short power interruptions. This capacity is based on the time needed for a technician to travel to the site to install a portable generator if needed.<sup>95</sup>
- 1.42 During the electricity outages emergency, the duration of the outage depleted the batteries at Telstra sites.<sup>96</sup> Witnesses reported that battery backup at Telstra's White Cliffs site was exhausted within a few hours.<sup>97</sup> The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling reported some mobile sites went offline two hours after the electricity outage, and others remained offline for more than 24 hours.<sup>98</sup>
- 1.43 Initially, Telstra deployed staff and portable generators to the region.<sup>99</sup> Once Transgrid's backup generator kicked in and mains power was restored to the

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<sup>91</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 8.

<sup>92</sup> [Submission 46](#), Telstra, pp 2-3.

<sup>93</sup> [Submission 46](#), p 3.

<sup>94</sup> [Submission 4](#), p 4.

<sup>95</sup> [Submission 46](#), p 5.

<sup>96</sup> [Submission 46](#), p 3.

<sup>97</sup> Dick Wagner, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 1; Greg Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 12.

<sup>98</sup> [Submission 20](#), p 1.

<sup>99</sup> [Submission 46](#), p 3.

network site, Telstra began disconnecting and removing generators from the sites. By 21 October, all generators were disconnected.<sup>100</sup> When Telstra was advised that the generator had tripped on 21 October, they deemed it not to be a reliable source of power and returned to reconnect portable generators to the network sites.<sup>101</sup>

- 1.44 The Committee notes that, while Telstra has systems in place to ensure that the telecommunications network can operate during electricity outages, these reserves for their transmission towers in the Far West region were not enough to manage the prolonged periods without mains power experienced during the emergency. As these reserves were inadequate, residents in the region experienced substantial time periods of mobile telecommunications outages.<sup>102</sup>
- 1.45 Stakeholders also reported that the response to the initial outage was slow, with portable generators connected long after the batteries had already been depleted.<sup>103</sup> In White Cliffs, locals took to connecting their own generator to the mobile site before a Telstra technician arrived.<sup>104</sup>
- 1.46 The Committee recognises the fundamental importance of mobile access in modern life, particularly for a remote region like the Far West. Without access to mobile telecommunications, residents are effectively cut off and further isolated from the world because they lose access to other people and information. This lack of connectivity meant residents were unable to receive any official updates or information from emergency response agencies and energy service providers, which is discussed further in Chapter Five. Making matters worse, we note that these telecommunications outages meant that there were periods of time where residents were not able to call Triple Zero or contact emergency services.<sup>105</sup> This issue is further explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>100</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Telstra, 27 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>101</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Telstra, p 4; [Submission 46](#), p 4; Paul Harrison, National Emergency Manager, Incident Operations, Telstra, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 64.

<sup>102</sup> [Submission 16](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3; [Submission 37](#), Broken Hill Musicians Club, p 11; Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>103</sup> [Submission 4](#), p 4; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 1; [Submission 48](#), Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, p 1.

<sup>104</sup> [Submission 4](#), p 4.

<sup>105</sup> [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 1; [Submission 37](#), p 11; [Submission 35](#), p 8; [Submission 46](#), p 4.



## Chapter Two – The impact of the outages on the community

### Finding 2

**The electricity outages emergency affecting Far West NSW from 17 October 2024, and the resulting telecommunications outages, had far-reaching and serious impacts on communities across the region beyond the significant economic losses to individuals and businesses. The unstable power supply had hazardous health implications for many residents with chronic health conditions, and the uncertainty around access to power and telecommunications, including emergency services, had significant mental health impacts. These impacts were exacerbated by the geographical isolation of the region, particularly for those community members living in outlying towns and remote stations outside Broken Hill.**

- 2.1 Many affected residents and stakeholders told the Committee of the significant challenges they faced due to the electricity outages emergency.<sup>106</sup> We understand that some community members of the Far West region were left without power for hours or even days during the electricity outages emergency,<sup>107</sup> with interruptions to power occurring on and off for around two weeks.
- 2.2 However, residents reported very different experiences depending on where they lived and whether they already had generators in case of power outages.<sup>108</sup> One resident told us that her cattle station property outside of Tibooburra was without power for 19 days and she had to buy a generator online for her property.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, another submission-maker reported that he was largely unaffected because he was able to rely on a generator.<sup>110</sup> Although some people did have backup power throughout the emergency period, it is clear to us that many people across the region were negatively impacted by the prolonged period of disrupted access to electricity and mobile telecommunications.
- 2.3 The Minister for Energy, the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC acknowledged that 'the emergency had a deep impact on Broken Hill, Milparinka, Menindee, Packsaddle, Silverton, Tibooburra, White Cliffs, Wilcannia and surrounds.'<sup>111</sup> As the Minister further stated, the inquiry 'is an important opportunity for those affected by this emergency to tell these stories.'<sup>112</sup> For this reason, the Committee is grateful for

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<sup>106</sup> [Submission 21](#), Country Women's Association of NSW, pp 1-2; [Submission 32](#), Mr Zane Smith, pp 1-2; [Submission 34](#), Mr Gerry Leaver, pp 1-2; Jason Harvey, Outback Pharmacies, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 44-45.

<sup>107</sup> [Submission 34](#), p 2; Rebecca Young, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>108</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, Tibooburra and District Progress Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 2; Dick Wagner, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 1; Pat Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>109</sup> Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>110</sup> [Submission 7](#), Mr Adam Hellyer, p 1.

<sup>111</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 0.

<sup>112</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 0.

the extensive engagement with affected community members across the Far West who made submissions and spoke to us directly when we travelled to the region in March this year.

- 2.4 This chapter is intended to respect the stories we heard by outlining the experiences and impacts of the emergency on the Far West NSW communities as we heard them. We recognise the far-reaching and serious impacts that the emergency had on communities across the region. As set out below, these impacts go beyond significant economic losses to people and businesses. The extended periods of unstable power supply had hazardous health implications for many residents with chronic health conditions. In some cases it also hurt the community's mental health, due to the uncertainty about access to power and telecommunications, including the ability to contact emergency services.

## Health and wellbeing, particularly mental health, of communities and individuals

- 2.5 The Committee acknowledges the very serious implications for the health and wellbeing of community members in Far West NSW due to the long stretches of time without electricity and the uncertainty around power supply. This is particularly concerning given the population of the Far West region is ageing, has a high proportion of Aboriginal people and higher than average morbidity rates for illness.<sup>113</sup> Even with this and other inquiries being held, we may never understand the full extent of the health impacts of the emergency.
- 2.6 We heard concerns for the region's residents with disability and chronic health issues who relied on electricity for their long-term health needs,<sup>114</sup> e.g. being unable to charge electric wheelchairs,<sup>115</sup> or medical alert bracelets not working.<sup>116</sup> Mr Leroy Johnson, a resident of Mutawintji, described the difficulty he experienced as a person with chronic health needs requiring home dialysis.<sup>117</sup> His experience is detailed later in Chapter Four.
- 2.7 A number of stakeholders told us that they and other local community members depended on electronic medical devices like home ventilators or continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines to breathe regularly when they sleep. They risked medical distress and adverse health impacts without the use of these devices.<sup>118</sup>
- 2.8 Some stakeholders relied on medication which needed to be stored in their fridge. As a result, some residents lost significant amounts of medication (sometimes thousands of dollars' worth) due to the prolonged periods where

<sup>113</sup> [Submission 19](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, p 1.

<sup>114</sup> [Submission 37](#), Broken Hill Musicians Club, p 6; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8; Michael Boland, General Manager and Company Secretary, Broken Hill Musicians Club, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>115</sup> [Submission 12](#), National Disability Services, p 6.

<sup>116</sup> Lindsay White, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 3.

<sup>117</sup> [Submission 3](#), Mr Leroy Johnson, p 1.

<sup>118</sup> [Submission 8](#), Michael and Rita Bruggy, p 1; [Submission 12](#), p 6; [Submission 21](#), p 1; [Submission 22](#), Mr Grant Boylan, p 1; [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 48](#), Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, p 1; Barbara Webster, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Michael Bruggy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4.

their fridges were not powered,<sup>119</sup> or otherwise had to use ice in order to preserve their medication.<sup>120</sup>

- 2.9 On top of this, we heard that local pharmacists also lost refrigerated medication, and were unable to access electronic prescriptions.<sup>121</sup> An owner of Outback Pharmacies highlighted the significant financial and time costs to his business attempting to secure resupplies of lost medication and vaccinations.<sup>122</sup>

- 2.10 We heard widespread accounts about the personal stress this had on individuals trying to still carry out everyday life and plan around outage periods, particularly on families with young children.<sup>123</sup> Mrs Rita Bruggy, who relies on a CPAP machine, described the significant mental health consequences of the emergency which is discussed in the below case study.

**Case study 1: Rita, who relies on a CPAP machine, experienced considerable distress as a result of the outage<sup>124</sup>**

Michael and Rita are an older couple who live outside Broken Hill. Michael was working 600 km away from home when the power went off and the emergency started. This left his wife, Rita to struggle with the emergency on her own in circumstances where she lost mobile service and then all her devices lost power, including her phone, iPad and CPAP machine. She had no way of communicating with others or contacting emergency services. She was almost completely isolated, with the exception of a few people who tried to keep in contact with her until their devices ran out of power too.

Rita described how scary this situation was, causing her an enormous amount of personal stress that took time to settle even after the emergency was largely resolved. She couldn't safely sleep with her CPAP machine and feared it would stop working – either because it would run out of power or power would be cut off while she slept. Because the CPAP machine involves a fitted mask, Michael described how distressing it is for his wife to be suddenly woken up unable to breathe with a mask constraining her. On top of all this and her feeling of being isolated from the outside world, Rita was also scared to move around too much in the dark because she has already had 19 falls.

We are grateful to Rita for generously sharing her story at our town hall in Broken Hill.

- 2.11 IGA Broken Hill noted that the 'uncertainty and stress caused by the power outages' had a toll on the mental health of the owners and staff who had to work under challenging conditions.<sup>125</sup> We heard similar concerns from National Disability Services for the staff providing people with critical disability support.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> [Submission 16](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3; [Submission 1](#), Mrs Sheryl Rowlands, p 1.

<sup>120</sup> Barbara Stephens, International Officer, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>121</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 7; Jason Harvey, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 38-39.

<sup>122</sup> Jason Harvey, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 44.

<sup>123</sup> [Submission 21](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 48](#), pp 1-2; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4; Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; Penelope Clarke, Member, Western Division Council, NSW Farmers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>124</sup> [Submission 8](#), pp 1-2; Rita Bruggy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 4-6; Michael Bruggy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 4-6.

<sup>125</sup> [Submission 38](#), IGA Broken Hill, p 1.

<sup>126</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 6.

- 2.12 Load shedding, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, contributed to general uncertainty in the community about the status of the power supply. Residents emphasised the mental health impacts caused by the uncertainty around when power would be turned off.<sup>127</sup>
- 2.13 These mental health impacts were made worse by the loss of telecommunications, particularly mobile service. As mentioned earlier, losing access to mobile services has a significant impact on modern life and effectively cut off communities from information and outside contact. Inquiry participants told us about the anxiety caused by not being able to communicate with others or carry out welfare checks by phone, especially for vulnerable residents like those living with a disability, those living alone, or who live in the isolated towns or remote stations outside of Broken Hill.<sup>128</sup>
- 2.14 Of major concern was the fact that residents could not contact emergency services if they needed help during the telecommunications outages.<sup>129</sup> This meant that people living on remote properties and stations would have to evacuate themselves in an emergency – if they were able.<sup>130</sup> Broken Hill City Council noted that the telecommunications outages also affected the ability of emergency services to respond to critical situations.<sup>131</sup> The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), Menindee Headquarters Brigade also recounted that losing telecommunications service 'heavily impacted on our ability co-ordinate an emergency response capability'.<sup>132</sup>
- 2.15 These mental health impacts did not end when the Far West grid was reconnected to the National Electricity Market (NEM).<sup>133</sup> The Mining and Energy Union told us the stress caused by the emergency was still ongoing for many of their members.<sup>134</sup> The Menindee RFS Brigade raised ongoing concerns for their local community, telling us that minor power outages since the emergency has caused 'significant stress' about 'how long and [the] cause of any outage'.<sup>135</sup>

## Personal care, everyday life and household finances

### Finding 3

**Several residents across Far West NSW reported that, during the emergency period with unstable power supply, voltage fluctuations and spikes caused permanent damage to electrical appliances, particularly essential white goods**

<sup>127</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 7; [Submission 48](#), p 1; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 37.

<sup>128</sup> [Submission 12](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 37](#), p 7; [Submission 48](#), p 1; Rita Bruggy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>129</sup> [Submission 8](#), p 1; [Submission 12](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 35](#), p 8; [Submission 37](#), p 6; Michelle Kelly, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Lindsay White, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 3; Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 13; Gerry Leaver, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 14, 19; Rosie Siemer, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 19; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>130</sup> Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 35; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>131</sup> [Submission 16](#), p 1.

<sup>132</sup> [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 1.

<sup>133</sup> [Submission 18](#), p 2; Jill Schinella, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 2-3; Rita Bruggy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>134</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Mining and Energy Union, 3 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>135</sup> [Submission 18](#), p 2.

**like refrigerators. Some residents in the outlying towns like Wilcannia have not been able to replace these appliances and were still without fridges close to six months after the emergency.**

- 2.16 The electricity outages emergency significantly inconvenienced, or otherwise prevented, affected residents from being able to carry out their normal lives.<sup>136</sup> It is clear that being without power for such long periods affected almost every aspect of modern life, particularly given its impact on internet and mobile access.
- 2.17 Inquiry participants raised concerns about the impact of power outages on essential services like healthcare and schools.<sup>137</sup> Some submissions pointed out that schools faced closure, or their operations were impacted,<sup>138</sup> and that local students undertaking the HSC had their studies adversely impacted.<sup>139</sup>
- 2.18 Submissions also noted concerning reports that sewage and water pumps in Wilcannia stopped working, causing drinking water to run low and a backup of untreated sewage.<sup>140</sup> Separately, Rebecca Young, the owner of the Milparinka Hotel in the Unincorporated Area, told us that she lost power for three days while hosting a rally event for 500 people and, as a result, could not 'even flush a toilet'.<sup>141</sup>
- 2.19 In their submission, Michael and Rita Bruggy highlighted how the lack of power prevented them from carrying on their normal everyday lives.<sup>142</sup> National Disability Services also highlighted that their members had reported not being able to maintain personal and healthcare routines due to losing access to hot water or being unable to 'safely light' homes.<sup>143</sup> This caused particular stress to young families who could not boil water for baby bottles.<sup>144</sup>
- 2.20 We also heard about the toll of not having air conditioning and temperature control systems since the region experiences intensely hot temperatures, illustrated in the case study below.<sup>145</sup> This lack of air conditioning interfered with the ability to sleep.<sup>146</sup> Rhonda Hynch, Chair of the Wilcannia Working Party, had to take her newborn grandson to the local hospital to access air conditioning.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>136</sup> [Submission 34](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 8](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 32](#), Mr Zane Smith, pp 1-2; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.

<sup>137</sup> [Submission 34](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 15](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 8.

<sup>138</sup> [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 34](#), p 2.

<sup>139</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 6.

<sup>140</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 48](#), p 1; [Submission 4](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 2.

<sup>141</sup> Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>142</sup> [Submission 8](#), pp 1-2.

<sup>143</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 5.

<sup>144</sup> [Submission 48](#), p 2.

<sup>145</sup> [Submission 8](#), p 2; [Submission 12](#), p 5; [Submission 32](#), p 2; [Submission 34](#), p 2; [Submission 48](#), p 1; Emma McLean, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 14; Rhona Hynch, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 15; Pat Barraclough, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22; William Murray, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22; Vicki Chorlton, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Eliza South, Country Women's Association Broken Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29; Dimity Philp, Service Manager, Westhaven, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 40.

<sup>146</sup> William Murray, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22.

<sup>147</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 15.

**Case study 2: How the heat impacted Emma McLean and her young family during the emergency<sup>148</sup>**

At the time when the emergency occurred, Emma and her young children had recently moved to Tibooburra from Bathurst for work. She found the relentless heat and lack of communications, services and food in Tibooburra were particular challenges of the Far West region's 'Corner Country'. Emma highlighted the tyranny of distance, noting it is nearly an eight-hour round trip just for her to go to the shops.

During the outages emergency, it was over 40°C in the Corner Country, and she had no way of cooling her house down or keeping food in her fridges and freezer cool. The only way for her young family to escape the heat was by going to one of the local pubs. She said, 'it's not a great back-up plan to take the kids to the pub if you have no power for three days.'

- 2.21 Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, also echoed constituents' concerns about being unable to plan for mealtimes, the charging of devices and other essential daily activities like baby bottle sterilisations. This inability was made worse by unclear messaging about load shedding.<sup>149</sup>
- 2.22 Many stakeholders recounted significant amounts of food stored in fridges and freezers being spoiled during the emergency, due to significant periods without power.<sup>150</sup> As a result of food spoilage, Heather Picken, Treasurer, Meals on Wheels Broken Hill, highlighted that they could not deliver food to clients.<sup>151</sup>
- 2.23 This issue of food spoilage was particularly concerning for households with young children and those with big families.<sup>152</sup> Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation highlighted that many communities couldn't afford to replace their lost food.<sup>153</sup> The below case study illustrates how the issue of food spoilage was widespread for the Wilcannia community.

**Case study 3: The costs of food spoilage for Rhonda Hynch's community<sup>154</sup>**

Rhonda is a resident of Wilcannia, a town over two hours away from Broken Hill with a significant Aboriginal population. She is also the Chair of the Wilcannia Community Working Party, the local peak representative body for the Aboriginal Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

Rhonda recounted the difficulty of the October 2024 electricity outages emergency for many people in her community, especially those with young families. She knew of some people spending their money on bags of ice to try and keep their freezers cool, in hopes of saving some food from spoiling.

Her daughter had fully stocked her fridge the day before the emergency began, so was then forced to cook everything to avoid spoilage. In fact, the community as a whole had

<sup>148</sup> Emma McLean, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 14, 16-18.

<sup>149</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4.

<sup>150</sup> [Submission 1](#), p 1; [Submission 4](#), p 2; [Submission 10](#), Mrs Helen Murray, p 1; [Submission 21](#), p 1; [Submission 31](#), Mr Justin Lohmann, p 1; [Submission 32](#), p 1; [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 48](#), pp 1-2; Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 4; Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13; Lindsay White, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 4; Vicki Chorlton, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>151</sup> Heather Picken, Treasurer, Meals on Wheels Broken Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 26, 27.

<sup>152</sup> [Submission 9](#), Vicki Chorlton, p 1; Vicki Chorlton, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6; Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>153</sup> [Submission 48](#), p 2.

<sup>154</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 15-16.



to prematurely cook their perishable food and share it around, leading people to scramble to get a hold of little gas barbeques just so they could cook. There were also open fires being used during fire season, a hot and dry period, which was not ideal.

- 2.24 Making this situation worse, stakeholders recounted experiences of equipment failing or being damaged by the repeated outages and potential voltage instability. This included small electrical appliances and important whitegoods like fridges and freezers.<sup>155</sup> Although Essential Energy did not receive any reports of faults or damage to appliances during the outages,<sup>156</sup> we directly heard contradicting accounts from residents during our time in the region. Michael Kennedy from the Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) told us that his fridge blew out so he had to rely on his sister's spare and much smaller fridge. As a result, he described losing a lot of food and having to cook as much of it as possible 'before it went bad'.<sup>157</sup>
- 2.25 Mr Butler also raised concerns about insurance available to residents in the Far West to cover costs resulting from the electricity outages emergency. He noted that many residents did not have home contents insurance 'due to the current costs of living' at the time, and was advised by the Wilcannia LALC that most of their members were uninsured.<sup>158</sup> Lindsay White, a resident of White Cliffs, informed us that no insurer would provide home and contents insurance for the town's local residents who mainly live underground.<sup>159</sup>
- 2.26 For those who were insured, Mr Butler highlighted communications from the Insurance Council of Australia advising that most home and contents policies did not cover food spoilage, which was the majority of insurance claims.<sup>160</sup> He further noted that replacing these damaged appliances and whitegoods 'did not fall under any compensation scheme that was available'.<sup>161</sup>
- 2.27 Most concerningly, the Committee heard during its visit to the Far West in early March this year that some residents living in isolated outlying communities like Wilcannia had not been able to replace damaged whitegoods. This meant that some people were still without fridges some six months after the emergency.<sup>162</sup>

## Business and industry in the region

- 2.28 The Committee also heard about the impact on businesses caused by the power outages and disruptions that occurred over the span of the emergency period. These impacts had a direct financial consequence for local businesses. As Mr

<sup>155</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 5; Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13; Anny O'Connor, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 19; Matt Young, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), pp 4, 5-6; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 4, 8.

<sup>156</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Essential Energy, 28 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>157</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.

<sup>158</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 4-5; [Answer to supplementary question](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, 7 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>159</sup> Lindsay White, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 7.

<sup>160</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4; [Answer to question](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 1.

<sup>161</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 5. See also [Answer to question](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 1.

<sup>162</sup> Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 6; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8.

Butler described in his submission, the impact on businesses was 'extensive and far reaching' and may not be fully comprehended.<sup>163</sup>

2.29 Regional Development Australia Far West ('RDA Far West') submitted that all 179 local businesses in the Far West region surveyed had reported that their business was impacted by the power outages.<sup>164</sup> Both NSW Farmers and the Pastoralists' Association of West Darling highlighted that the agriculture industry and pastoralists in the region were also significantly impacted by the outages emergency.<sup>165</sup>

2.30 Alarmingly, the loss of power interfered with fuel services. Given the vast distances and the mining industry's reliance on fuel, the Committee recognises that all residents and industries in the Far West depend on reliable access to fuel. The disruption to fuel services had a flow-on impact during the emergency because most small generators operated by households and businesses ran on fuel.<sup>166</sup> One fuel depot operator in Wilcannia agreed that 'generators, everything' was reliant on fuel in the emergency.<sup>167</sup> For example, for residents to be able to charge electronic devices like mobiles using their cars, they would need access to a vehicle and fuel.

2.31 Residents of Tibooburra and Packsaddle informed us that their fuel stations relied on telecommunications access in order to pump fuel. The resulting telecommunications outages meant the town's fuel bowsers did not work.<sup>168</sup> We heard stories of individuals travelling far distances and having to queue in long lines for fuel, lasting up to hours, during the emergency.<sup>169</sup> Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation described the vicious effects of this fuel shortage:

Fuel was the other stressor with only one service station in town operating, the line-up took up to 1 hour to get fuel or more – if you had the fuel already to keep the vehicle running that long to stay in line.

People needed fuel to travel for medical appointments and to return back and forth if needed from outer communities.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 5.

<sup>164</sup> [Submission 19](#), pp 2-3.

<sup>165</sup> [Submission 20](#), Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD), p 1; Gerard Glover, Chair, Western Division Council, NSW Farmers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 33-34.

<sup>166</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 18](#), p 2; [Submission 22](#), p 1; Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 12; Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 7; Michael Williams, Chief Executive Officer and Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>167</sup> Pat Barraclough, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 20.

<sup>168</sup> Mia Degoumois, Packsaddle Roadhouse, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4; Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>169</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 48](#), p 2; Barbara Webster, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Rosie Siemer, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 17; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>170</sup> [Submission 48](#), p 2.

- 2.32 Another widespread impact of the outages on businesses in the region was forced closure at various times.<sup>171</sup> Uncertainty about when they could operate their businesses made this issue worse, and employers were either required to pay salaries during the forced closures or stand down their employees.<sup>172</sup>
- 2.33 Many stakeholders drew our attention to the impacts of the electricity outages emergency on the region's mining industry, which is the biggest employer and driver of the local economy.<sup>173</sup> Because of the unreliable power supply and unclear communication about load shedding, the local mines operated by Perilya and Consolidated Broken Hill Mines were not able to properly operate.<sup>174</sup>
- 2.34 Mine workers were stood down on leave during the emergency period because it was not safe to permit them to enter the work site without stable power supply. As a result, contracted and casual workers were not receiving income for an undefined period of time.<sup>175</sup> We also heard that payroll for employees could not be processed during the outages.<sup>176</sup>
- 2.35 The mining-related services industry in the region was unable to generate income, and these businesses faced the financial stress of deciding whether to continue paying staff during this period. Todd Ferguson, Organiser, Mining and Energy Union, described the knock-on effects for mining employees forced to use their leave to cover the unplanned shutdown of mining operations. He noted that people were forced to give up holidays planned for future annual leave.<sup>177</sup>
- 2.36 These impacts on the mining industry had knock-on effects to local businesses,<sup>178</sup> including retail which relies on workers from mines and mining-related services to spend disposable income.<sup>179</sup> On top of the decrease in revenue, the outages also had a direct impact on businesses' ability to operate, including:
- loss of power contributing to an unsafe working environment,<sup>180</sup>
  - being unable to make sales using electronic payment methods,<sup>181</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Stephen Pascoe, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 2; Michael Schinella, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 10.

<sup>172</sup> [Submission 19](#), pp 2-3; Jill Schinella, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 8; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p34; [Answers to questions](#), Mining and Energy Union, p 1.

<sup>173</sup> Bruce Byrne, Chief Operating Officer, Perilya, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>174</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 6; [Submission 34](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 7; Bruce Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 21; [Answers to questions](#), Mining and Energy Union, p 1.

<sup>175</sup> Bruce Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 21; Todd Ferguson, Organiser, Mining and Energy Union, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 23; [Submission 15](#), p 6; [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Answers to questions](#), Mining and Energy Union, p 1.

<sup>176</sup> Bruce Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>177</sup> Todd Ferguson, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 23.

<sup>178</sup> Gerry Leaver, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>179</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 6; [Submission 34](#), p 2; Rosie Siemer, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>180</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 7; Bruce Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 20; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 38.

<sup>181</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 5; [Submission 19](#), p 3; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36.

- loss of stock or orders, including spoiled food and food waste,<sup>182</sup>
- additional expenses for purchasing or hiring equipment to remain operational, including generators,<sup>183</sup> and
- accommodation providers being unable to provide full services like meals and air-conditioning, and having many cancellations.<sup>184</sup>

**Case study 4: How the outages impacted Rebecca Young's small business<sup>185</sup>**

Milparinka Hotel is located 40 km south of Tibooburra. Rebecca Young, the hotel operator, advised that they were without power for three days, causing significant business interruption to an event that was being held at the venue.

She told us that, at the time of the outage emergency, 'I had a rally of 500 people... The rally organisers were starting to get a bit shirty at me because we were struggling to keep up' and that:

I have no generators, so I've lost food and loss of business, and it was just a nightmare. Without power we can't even flush a toilet, so we've got three days where we can't even flush a toilet. I felt three days like I may as well have gone camping in the bush with nothing. I just feel very left out of the loop as my business and a small town—I've no idea what's going on.

- 2.37 Local business stakeholders also reported significant financial costs due to equipment being damaged during the electricity outages emergency.<sup>186</sup> Jill Schinella, who owns IGA Broken Hill, noted that the losses suffered by the business were particularly significant because 'the day of the power outage was the day that most of our fresh stock arrived into Broken Hill', which meant 'all our coolrooms and freezers were chock-a-block full'. She told us that her husband had to stay in the store overnight to keep these coolrooms, freezers and fridges running, which meant 'he slept there so that every couple of hours, he could put diesel into the generator to keep it going'.<sup>187</sup>
- 2.38 For many small businesses across the Far West region reliant on tourism, the electricity outages emergency and resulting communications discouraging travel to the region due to the emergency impacted their businesses.<sup>188</sup> Mrs Helen Murray, a resident of Silverton, highlighted that this messaging without follow-up communications encouraging tourists to return after the emergency 'resulted in

<sup>182</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 3; [Submission 34](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 7; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 34,37; Jason Harvey, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 39.

<sup>183</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 3; [Submission 34](#), p 2; [Submission 38](#), IGA Broken Hill, p 1; [Submission 38](#), IGA Broken Hill, p 1; Jennifer Thwaites, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 3; Jill Schinella, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 2; Bruce Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 22; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>184</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 3; Helen Murray, Secretary, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 21; Mia Degoumois, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 12; Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 13, 18-19; Melissa Thomson, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18.

<sup>185</sup> Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>186</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 3; [Submission 37](#), p 10; Stephen Pascoe, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 2, 9; Jill Schinella, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 2; Michael Schinella, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 9; Gerry Leaver, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 16.

<sup>187</sup> Jill Schinella, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>188</sup> Dick Wagner, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 2; Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 6; Stephen Pascoe, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 10.

the almost immediate end to the tourist season in the Far West'. This has left many businesses 'in a dire financial situation' because they still have operating expenses to pay despite these warnings prematurely beginning the quiet tourist period that usually happens over just the summer.<sup>189</sup>

- 2.39 Finally, we also heard about insurance coverage claims relating to the business impacts of the outages. RDA Far West told us that the majority of Far West businesses they heard from anticipated that their business losses would not be covered by their insurance. For those that thought they could be covered by insurance, some reported that dealing with their insurers, including the additional expenses and time required, was not worth what they might recover from insurance.<sup>190</sup> Stakeholders also emphasised that insurance claims would raise their premiums for next year.<sup>191</sup>

## Impact on residents living in isolated or remote locations, Aboriginal communities and vulnerable community members

### The added pressure of geographical isolation and distance during the emergency

#### Finding 4

**The residents outside of Broken Hill were impacted differently to residents in Broken Hill. As a result, downstream customers living in the smaller, more isolated towns or on remote stations outside Broken Hill experienced longer periods of power outages and had different access to electricity supply than those residents in Broken Hill.**

- 2.40 The residents of the remote communities outside Broken Hill, particularly those living on remote stations, experienced longer power outages and had different access to electricity than those living in Broken Hill.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, these communities were the first to lose mobile telecommunications services. Gerard Glover, Chair of the NSW Farmers' Western Division Council, emphasised how critical the mobile telecommunications issue was for these remote communities because it 'leaves very remote communities vulnerable as distances are vast and resources are limited.'<sup>193</sup>
- 2.41 For these residents, the impacts were made harder by their geographical isolation. As pointed out by a number of inquiry participants, the geographical isolation and distances between communities across the Far West region adds extra complexity and risk to any emergencies affecting the region.<sup>194</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, a member of the Tibooburra and District Progress Association, clarified that her community 'isn't just those of us in town.' She emphasised that:

<sup>189</sup> [Submission 10](#), p 1.

<sup>190</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 4.

<sup>191</sup> Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 6; [Submission 38](#), p 2; Stephen Pascoe, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 8; Jason Harvey, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 38.

<sup>192</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 7.

<sup>193</sup> Gerard Glover, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33.

<sup>194</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 9; Rosie Siemer, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 17.

Our community goes 400, 500, 600, 700 kilometres around, and a lot of station people were left high and dry, because some of them don't have generators. They had to go and organise generators for themselves, as well. A lot of them have got families with young children. So it's not just us in town, here. It's everyone around.<sup>195</sup>

- 2.42 RDA Far West highlighted that the residents and businesses of the Far West region 'are unable to access the same level of services as other regions in the state', with a notable lack of access to public transport, education and health services.<sup>196</sup> This is particularly hard for the Far West communities located outside Broken Hill. The Menindee Rural Fire Service (RFS) Brigade captain informed us that access to their town from Broken Hill can be cut off for several hours if there is '25 mL of rain in Broken Hill'.<sup>197</sup>
- 2.43 The issue of food spoilage was especially pronounced for those living outside of Broken Hill, since they do not have ready access to large, local grocery stores and the price of fresh perishable food is more expensive than in metropolitan and coastal areas.<sup>198</sup> Residents from these smaller, outlying communities often bulk purchase perishable foods and goods in regular shopping trips to larger town centres some distance away. These goods are then stored in freezers in their homes.<sup>199</sup> As Mr Butler MP highlighted, this meant that these community members from towns like Tibooburra naturally lost larger amounts of perishable items.<sup>200</sup> Given the considerable distance travelled to acquire fresh groceries, replacing lost items for individuals living in remote parts of the region would be greater than those in Broken Hill.<sup>201</sup>
- 2.44 RDA Far West emphasised the particular challenges for communities in the Unincorporated Area who lack a local government authority to advocate or support them.<sup>202</sup> As a result, residents of the Unincorporated Area are left uninformed and not as supported during electricity and telecommunications outages compared to the rest of the Far West region.<sup>203</sup> One business owner in Tibooburra remarked that she felt 'Tibooburra seems to get forgotten'.<sup>204</sup>
- 2.45 We heard about the unique challenges for towns like Silverton and those in the 'Corner Country', including Tibooburra, Milparinka and Packsaddle, which all rely on single distribution lines. This area may be left for days without power because

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<sup>195</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>196</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 6.

<sup>197</sup> Graeme McCrabb, Captain, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 17.

<sup>198</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4; Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>199</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4; [Submission 48](#), p 1; William Murray, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 17; Luke Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer, Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 46; [Answer to question on notice](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, 28 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>200</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4.

<sup>201</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 4.

<sup>202</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 5; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p34.

<sup>203</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 5; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33; Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p13; Anny O'Connor, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p15; Vicki Jackson, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p17.

<sup>204</sup> Melissa Thomson, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18.



providers usually need days to access the region.<sup>205</sup> One resident of Tibooburra highlighted the impacts of the lack of fuel:

...if I've driven back from Broken Hill, I don't have enough fuel to drive back again or to drive terribly far. If we have no power and no fuel, I can't then refuel to physically drive somewhere because there's not enough fuel. My personal car doesn't have a long-range tank.<sup>206</sup>

- 2.46 Mr Butler MP also heard reports of residents in the Far West purchasing their own generators or using their camping equipment to generate their own electricity. He noted that this self-sufficiency 'is often the case with people living in harsher conditions'.<sup>207</sup> However, he acknowledged that there were many community members who did not have the capacity to get or access their own generator.<sup>208</sup> Relevantly, Tracey Hotchin, a Tibooburra resident, remarked that people had to travel to Broken Hill to get a generator but they were sold out during the emergency.<sup>209</sup>
- 2.47 These accounts we have directly received from people in the region demonstrate the unique hardships for the smaller, more isolated communities outside Broken Hill. Having found that these communities experienced longer power and telecommunications outages and different access to electricity, it is clear to the Committee that the people living in remote towns and stations in the Far West region were impacted differently to those living in Broken Hill.

### **Unique challenges faced by Aboriginal communities in the Far West**

- 2.48 As outlined in Chapter One, a significant portion of the Wilcannia and Menindee population identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. On top of the factor of distance and remoteness, Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary of Aboriginal Affairs NSW, drew attention to the disproportionate exposure of Aboriginal communities to climate and related emergencies, which only worsen the widely recognised existing structural and systemic inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations.<sup>210</sup>
- 2.49 Witnesses also drew attention to the existing inequalities faced by some residents in Wilcannia.<sup>211</sup> Representatives from the Wilcannia LALC informed us that they own 64 houses for Aboriginal tenants in the community, and that the Aboriginal Housing Office operates around 30 other houses. However, they believed that none of these tenants would have had access to a generator or backup power.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> [Submission 19](#), pp 5-6; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p34.

<sup>206</sup> Emma McLean, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 16-17.

<sup>207</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 5.

<sup>208</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 5.

<sup>209</sup> Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>210</sup> Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>211</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4; Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>212</sup> Jennifer Thwaites, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 3; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 3.

- 2.50 In addition to the impacts on households, as noted earlier, water pumps and sewerage services in Wilcannia also relied on power. As a result, the Aboriginal communities in Wilcannia were uniquely burdened in the region by limited water supply. Rhonda Hynch, Chair of the Wilcannia Working Party, recounted:

I rung our GM [General Manager of Central Darling Shire Council] and I said to him, "We need to get water out, because I don't know about the pump station, around the pump station, and get water to our Elders and our young ones," for clean water, and things like that. So we had water sitting in pipelines. They end up bringing out another generator just for the pump station, but that was about four days later — four to five days later.<sup>213</sup>

### **Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable community members**

- 2.51 The Committee recognises that the personal impacts of losing power for long periods of time are particularly significant for the Far West region, given its lower socioeconomic context and higher than average unemployment rate.<sup>214</sup> The outages emergency had disproportionate impacts on certain vulnerable community members like young families, older people and people with disabilities and health conditions, particularly in more isolated areas outside of Broken Hill.<sup>215</sup>
- 2.52 Legal Aid NSW outlined how the emergency added to existing hardships, including financial hardships, faced by their clients. They highlighted the impacts of disruptions to pending legal proceedings, particularly for criminal defendants, and some clients reporting increased incidents of domestic and family violence.<sup>216</sup> The Department of Communities and Justice also noted that their Community Service Centres (CSCs) which deliver social casework to vulnerable community members had to close when backup generators supplied by Essential Energy failed. This meant calls and visitors to these CSCs had to be diverted to the Dareton CSC, almost three hours' drive away.<sup>217</sup>
- 2.53 We also heard about the disproportionate impact of the electricity outages emergency, and emergencies more generally, on people with disability. National Disability Services reported that their members provided feedback about the uniquely severe implications of the electricity outages emergency for people with disability.<sup>218</sup>
- 2.54 The National Disability Services' submission highlighted how emergencies increase the vulnerability of people with disability, particularly those who are socially isolated, live alone or in remote communities 'with limited access to transport to access emergency food, water and healthcare'. They noted that people with disability may be unprepared for emergencies, and may have

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<sup>213</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>214</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 1; Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>215</sup> [Submission 34](#), p 2; [Submission 48](#), p 2; Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 27.

<sup>216</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Legal Aid NSW, 27 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>217</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 1 April 2025, p 2.

<sup>218</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 6.

difficulty understanding what is happening or accessing available support and communications.<sup>219</sup> This is shown below.

**Case study 5: How Rena Callow was left isolated by the emergency<sup>220</sup>**

Rena lives by herself in Menindee, a town over one hour away from Broken Hill. She lives with chronic fatigue syndrome which causes her to get tired from walking small distances and limits her mobility. Adding to this, she had hit an emu with her car less than a week before the outages, leaving her without any reliable, independent mode of transport. As a result of these circumstances, Rena was unable to go out and seek help from anyone in town during the emergency. The only people that checked in on her were her friends. No organisations reached out to assist or inform her that there were facilities open to the community where she could go to refrigerate food and medicine, or charge devices. Because of the poor communication, she was left almost completely alone. She was understandably upset that she only found out this support was available after the power was restored.

- 2.55 Because of the particularly severe vulnerability of people with disabilities and other health conditions, the electricity outages emergency also had consequential impacts on the wellbeing of essential service workers in healthcare and disability support.<sup>221</sup> Two witnesses from NDIS service providers talked about the challenges for staff trying to communicate with clients and the need to ensure their staff were supported through the emergency.<sup>222</sup>
- 2.56 Stakeholders noted how the power outages impacted elderly residents harder, because they may be isolated or struggle to get information or support.<sup>223</sup> Residents from the remote towns outside of Broken Hill also raised particular concerns about the outages' impacts on elderly community members.<sup>224</sup>
- 2.57 Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association Menindee, recalled that one pensioner in Menindee typically spends their pension on groceries and other expenses once they have received it. As a result, they had spent their pension by the time of the emergency and, therefore, could not replace any food despite the supermarkets staying open.<sup>225</sup> We heard of a similar experience directly from a pensioner residing in Wilcannia, highlighted in the below case study.

**Case study 6: The particular hardships faced by Wilcannia pensioner, William Murray<sup>226</sup>**

William lives in a rented flat in Wilcannia and relies solely on his pension to cover all his expenses, including rent and food. He makes the two hour one-way trip out to Broken Hill once a fortnight, to bulk buy groceries in one go. When the outages emergency

<sup>219</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 6. See also Dimity Philp, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 41.

<sup>220</sup> Rena Callow, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 9-10.

<sup>221</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 6.

<sup>222</sup> Dimity Philp, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 40-41; Helen Miller, General Manager of In Home Supports and Clinical Lead, LiveBetter, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 40-41.

<sup>223</sup> Margot Muscat, President, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 12.

<sup>224</sup> Lindsay White, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 3; Anny O'Connor, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 14; Lorraine Looney, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 10.

<sup>225</sup> Lorraine Looney, Secretary, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 10.

<sup>226</sup> William Murray, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 17-18.

happened, William had to empty his fridge and freezer out. He could not afford anything more because his pension was not coming in. He said that 'a bloke had to starve for a fortnight', because he could not eat the two weeks' worth of food he had just purchased before it spoiled. As a pensioner living alone, William couldn't keep up to date with the latest news on the emergency because he lost access to his mobile which had died and he had no generator to get it charged.

## Chapter Three – Energy resilience and reliability in Far West NSW

### The reliability and effectiveness of existing redundancy strategies for Far West NSW

There are weaknesses in the Far West's electricity network

#### Finding 5

The electricity system in Far West NSW has particular vulnerabilities when it comes to energy reliability, due to the region's geographical isolation and its dependence on a single transmission line connection to the National Electricity Market. As a result, the region's residents experience power outages and disruptions more often than the general NSW population, particularly for communities outside of Broken Hill.

#### Finding 6

The risks to the critical electricity infrastructure in the Far West region of NSW is likely to increase as extreme weather events and natural disasters occur more often. Given the grid's vulnerability, the Far West region needs long-term redundancy arrangements in place. These arrangements should be regularly assessed and updated as needed, to ensure energy reliability for the grid.

- 3.1 The Committee heard from many stakeholders that the energy system in the Far West is vulnerable to power outages and is often unreliable. Stakeholders told us that the region has had several major power interruptions and that communities often experience outages.<sup>227</sup>
- 3.2 We heard about major outages in 2009 and 2022 that impacted the region,<sup>228</sup> with the last transmission outage in 2009 being repaired in around three weeks.<sup>229</sup> There have also been many smaller outages across the region, including 10 reported outages in the period from May 2019 to January 2025.<sup>230</sup> Greg Hill,

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<sup>227</sup> Peter Price, Treasurer Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 22; Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 2; Emma McLean, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 16; Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 10; Pat Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 18; Rhonda Hynch, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 18; William Murray, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 18; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 5; Terry Smith, President Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; [Submission 37](#), Broken Hill Musicians' Club, pp 4-5; Barbara Webster, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 3; Mr Andrew Holland, APM, Assistant Commissioner, NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>228</sup> Michelle Kelly, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>229</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 40.

<sup>230</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART), 2 April 2025, pp 2-3.

General Manager of Central Darling Shire Council, told us that 'we get power outages all the time in the Far West'.<sup>231</sup>

- 3.3 Mr Andrew Nicholls PSM, CEO of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART), remarked that problems in both the distribution and transmission networks can cause outages, though they often result from faults in the distribution network rather than just transmission infrastructure.<sup>232</sup>
- 3.4 One factor which makes the Far West electricity grid more vulnerable than other parts of NSW is that it is connected to the National Electricity Market (NEM) by a single transmission line, the 'X2 line'.<sup>233</sup> A disruption on this line results in outages across the entire region. A number of inquiry participants highlighted the vulnerability of the grid because of this dependence on a single transmission line.<sup>234</sup>
- 3.5 The region is also vulnerable due to its remoteness and the large distances between towns. This puts stress on the system and makes it hard to quickly repair infrastructure damaged during extreme weather events. Major disruptions to infrastructure can cause long outages as the remote terrain makes it difficult to access the poles and wires to repair them.<sup>235</sup>
- 3.6 Residents of Far West NSW also raised concerns that critical electricity infrastructure is not being properly maintained.<sup>236</sup> A resident of Tibooburra emphasised to the Committee that 'without maintenance—it's going to keep happening, but they've got to maintain the infrastructure they've got already'.<sup>237</sup>
- 3.7 The electricity outages emergency from 17 October 2024 reflected these existing weaknesses in the region's electricity system.<sup>238</sup> Stakeholders appreciated the growing risk to the Far West electricity system from more frequent extreme weather events and natural disasters,<sup>239</sup> particularly as climate change causes more frequent and severe storms.<sup>240</sup> A witness from Transgrid, recognised that

<sup>231</sup> Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 10.

<sup>232</sup> Mr Andrew Nicholls, CEO, IPART, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 31.

<sup>233</sup> Ms Kelly Kwan, Executive Director, Regulation and Compliance, IPART, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>234</sup> [Submission 33](#), Essential Energy, p 8; [Submission 16](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 1; Gerry Leaver, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 20.

<sup>235</sup> Michael Williams, Chief Executive Officer and Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West ('RDA Far West'), [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34.

<sup>236</sup> Rob Woods, Secretary, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 19; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 2; Stephen Pascoe, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 8; Todd Ferguson, Organiser, Mining and Energy Union, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 25; Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>237</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, Tibooburra and District Progress Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 11.

<sup>238</sup> [Submission 26](#), ClubsNSW, p 2; [Submission 27](#), Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 4; Gerard Glover, Chair Western Division Council, NSW Farmers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33; [Submission 33](#), p 8.

<sup>239</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 8; Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 78.

<sup>240</sup> [Submission 20](#), Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, p 2; [Submission 24](#), IPART, p 28.



improving energy resilience is critical as extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe.<sup>241</sup>

### The existing redundancy plans for the Far West region

- 3.8 As a transmission network service provider, Transgrid is required to meet the *NSW Electricity Transmission Reliability and Performance Standard 2017* (the 'Reliability Standard'). Under this Reliability Standard, Transgrid must ensure that each of their transmission systems meets a specified level of redundancy.<sup>242</sup>

#### What is meant by 'redundancy' in energy regulation?<sup>243</sup>

Redundancy is the number of backup arrangements that transmission network providers like Transgrid must have in place to support continued supply of electricity if part of the transmission network fails. Network providers can meet these backup arrangements using any combination of transmission network assets (e.g. additional transmission lines), non-network solutions (e.g. backup power generation through individual generators), or agreements with other providers to use part of an attached distribution network.

- 3.9 For the Broken Hill transmission lines, Transgrid is required to have one redundancy arrangement in place.<sup>244</sup> Ms Kelly Kwan, Executive Director, Regulation and Compliance, IPART, said that for the Far West region, this 'reliability condition' requires Transgrid to have backup power in place.<sup>245</sup>
- 3.10 As noted earlier, Transgrid's current redundancy arrangement for the Far West electricity system is generating backup power using two diesel-powered gas turbine generators, referred to as 'GT1' and 'GT2'. These generators were purchased from Essential Energy in 2022, after Essential Energy announced intentions to decommission these generators.<sup>246</sup>
- 3.11 However, Transgrid recognised that these generators are not a long-term solution. Before purchasing the generators, they commenced a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) in 2018 to evaluate options for securing the region's energy reliability. This identified the Silver City Advanced Compressed Air Energy Storage project (A-CAES) and microgrid by Hydrostor as the long-term redundancy arrangement, discussed later in this Chapter.<sup>247</sup>

### The effectiveness of the redundancy arrangement for backup power supply

#### Finding 7

**Transgrid's interim redundancy arrangements, which relied on the operation of their two diesel-fuelled gas turbine generators, failed to meet the community's reasonable expectations for the performance of their transmission network.**

<sup>241</sup> Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 78.

<sup>242</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 26; *NSW Electricity Transmission Reliability and Performance Standard 2017* cl 3.

<sup>243</sup> [Submission 24](#), pp 22-23.

<sup>244</sup> *NSW Electricity Transmission Reliability and Performance Standard 2017* sch 1.

<sup>245</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 33.

<sup>246</sup> [Submission 28](#), Transgrid, p 6-7.

<sup>247</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 6.

- 3.12 Community members across Far West NSW expressed their anger and frustration that Transgrid failed to ensure reliable power during the electricity outages emergency. Because the backup power supply was not adequate, the region had to face even further power disruptions from load shedding.
- 3.13 Once the region was disconnected from the NEM on 17 October 2024 because of damage to the transmission towers, Transgrid needed to rely on the generators to provide backup power so GT2 was then brought online within two hours. However, the other generator (GT1) was unavailable because it was undergoing refurbishment at the time of the emergency.<sup>248</sup> Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid explained this generator was unavailable because Transgrid had identified a major issue in GT1 after taking it offline for maintenance in August 2024.<sup>249</sup>
- 3.14 As a result, the backup power available under Transgrid's redundancy arrangement was significantly reduced and was unable to meet the peak power demand.<sup>250</sup> Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, also highlighted technical issues with the one available generator that caused it to trip multiple times,<sup>251</sup> and Transgrid acknowledged that it tripped on 21 and 25 October due to technical issues.<sup>252</sup>
- 3.15 As noted earlier, Transgrid purchased the generators in 2022 from Essential Energy, who owned, operated and maintained them until the sale. This purchase followed the decision to decommission the generators, which was advised to Transgrid, and was to meet the resilience obligations under their transmission licence, in accordance with the RIT-T process.
- 3.16 The condition of the generators was also raised by some inquiry participants.<sup>253</sup> Transgrid contended that the generators were in poor condition at the time of purchase from Essential Energy so they began refurbishment of the generators.<sup>254</sup> However, Essential Energy disputed this by contending that Transgrid was provided comprehensive information that the generators were in a 'reasonable operating condition considering their age at the time of their sale to Transgrid.'<sup>255</sup>
- 3.17 Part of the strategy to manage the insufficient backup power supply during the outages was to carry out load shedding across the Far West grid. Marie Jordan, Transgrid explained that load shedding was part of the strategy to support the grid and keep it stable, particularly for periods of peak demand.<sup>256</sup> As the

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<sup>248</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 7.

<sup>249</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 80-81.

<sup>250</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 83.

<sup>251</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>252</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 8.

<sup>253</sup> Peter Price, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 24; Rob Gregory, Volunteer and Contractor, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 18; Michael Boland, General Manager and Company Secretary, Broken Hill Musicians Club, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 19.

<sup>254</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 79.

<sup>255</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, pp 5-10.

<sup>256</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 83.

transmission operator, Transgrid was responsible for directing load shedding to manage demand and maintain the security of the network.<sup>257</sup>

#### What is 'load shedding'?

Load shedding is a strategy used by network providers to share around how much electricity is available to consumers when power demand exceeds the amount of available power. It is used to manage demand and maintain general grid security by progressively disconnecting and reconnecting different parts of the grid, causing periodic blackouts.

- 3.18 People in Far West NSW experienced a number of outages as a result, because they were manually cut off from power supply during load shedding. We heard that load shedding was responsible for four outages in Broken Hill,<sup>258</sup> and that load shedding was used on 18 October to cut power to 950 customers for 1 hour and 45 minutes, and another 1,300 customers for one hour.<sup>259</sup> We also heard in the town hall meetings we held across the Far West that many other communities outside Broken Hill experienced periodic planned and unplanned disruptions to reliable power supply, including Menindee, Tibooburra, White Cliffs and Wilcannia.<sup>260</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, unclear communication around the timing and length of power disruptions worsened community anxiety.
- 3.19 Some inquiry participants suggested that the extent of the outages demonstrated that the redundancy arrangements were not effective since Transgrid failed to provide adequate backup power.<sup>261</sup> At the very least, Transgrid's interim measure for backup power failed to meet the community's reasonable expectations for the performance of their transmission network.
- 3.20 While we understand that both generators were recently used to provide backup power to the region,<sup>262</sup> we note that the RIT-T process also determined that the gas turbine generators would need additional refurbishment investment to be a viable short-term backup power supply until 2026.<sup>263</sup> Until the long-term A-CAES project is implemented, energy reliability in the Far West may continue to be an issue while the region depends on the generators for redundancy.

## The regulatory framework for electricity

### Overview of the regulatory framework

- 3.21 The electricity outages emergency from October 2024 may raise significant regulatory issues. Energy is regulated under both federal and NSW laws and regulations, and this framework is very complex.

<sup>257</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 8.

<sup>258</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 7.

<sup>259</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>260</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16; Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 4; Matt Young, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 5; Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11.

<sup>261</sup> [Submission 12](#), National Disability Services, p 5; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 33-34.

<sup>262</sup> Transgrid, [Transgrid safely energises new permanent section of Broken Hill transmission line](#), media release, 12 May 2025, viewed 16 May 2025.

<sup>263</sup> [Submission 28](#), Transgrid, p 6.

**An overview of energy regulation in NSW**At the federal level

The National Electricity Rules (NER) and National Electricity Law (NEL) regulate the transmission, supply and distribution of electricity by imposing licence conditions on network service providers. Federal agencies perform different roles regulating, operating and enforcing compliance with the national regulatory framework. These agencies include the:

- Australian Energy Regulator (AER): independent agency responsible for regulating energy markets and networks under the NER and NEL,<sup>264</sup> including by maintaining guidelines, and enforcing compliance with the NEL and NER.<sup>265</sup>
- Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC): makes the NER, develops and maintains delegated legislation through the NER, National Gas Rules and National Energy Retail Rules, and conducts reviews and advises on energy market operations.
- Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO): operates the electricity and gas markets, ensures the reliability and security of the energy system and determines energy spot prices.

At the state level

The NSW Government and state agencies, primarily the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), also have a regulatory role. The NSW Minister for Energy has ministerial responsibility under different legislation including the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (the 'Electricity Supply Act').<sup>266</sup> NSW agencies also work with federal agencies to influence policy development, and support monitoring and compliance of the NEM's regulatory framework.

IPART is the independent agency responsible for regulating markets in NSW including energy. Its role in relation to energy includes the regulation of transmission and distribution network operators in NSW,<sup>267</sup> including administering the licensing regimes for network operators under the Electricity Supply Act and overseeing the safety of the electricity network and assets in NSW.<sup>268</sup>

- 3.22 In NSW, distribution and transmission network operators like Essential Energy and Transgrid must have a licence to operate a distribution or transmission system.<sup>269</sup> These operators must comply with licence conditions relating to reliability and performance.<sup>270</sup> Again, Transgrid must meet the Reliability Standard,<sup>271</sup> and IPART determines the level of redundancy for each transmission system and requires Transgrid to demonstrate compliance.<sup>272</sup>
- 3.23 IPART's licensing compliance regime generally follows a self-reporting model.<sup>273</sup> Relevantly, Transgrid is required to report to IPART any non-compliance with licence conditions and incidents that impact reliability and power quality in line

<sup>264</sup> [Submission 43](#), Australian Energy Regulator (AER), p 1.

<sup>265</sup> [Submission 43](#), p 4.

<sup>266</sup> [Electricity Supply Act 1995](#).

<sup>267</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 6-7.

<sup>268</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 9.

<sup>269</sup> Essential Energy, [Distribution Licence](#), Instrument of Variation of Conditions of Distributor's Licence, *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (NSW), 22 September 2023; Transgrid, [Transmission Licence](#), Instrument of Variation of Conditions of Transmission Operator's Licence, *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (NSW), 15 September 2023.

<sup>270</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 9.

<sup>271</sup> [NSW Electricity Transmission Reliability and Performance Standard 2017](#).

<sup>272</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 33.

<sup>273</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 9.

with these reporting manuals.<sup>274</sup> A witness from IPART told us that Transgrid have reported full compliance with their conditions since the Reliability Standards were first introduced.<sup>275</sup>

- 3.24 Network operators like Transgrid and Essential Energy must also report on their obligations to maintain their network infrastructure and assets, including an annual report on how they manage their assets. They must have an asset management framework and systems in place, compliance with which can be audited by IPART.<sup>276</sup>

## Current investigations into the October 2024 outages

### Finding 8

**The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW is currently investigating any potential breaches of Transgrid's licence conditions and/or its regulatory obligations under the NSW regulatory framework. Separately, the Australian Energy Regulator is currently also conducting an investigation into the outages from 17 October 2024 to determine whether there were any potential breaches of the National Electricity Rules. As a result, any questions regarding compliance or non-compliance with regulatory obligations and licences will be determined by these investigations.**

- 3.25 Both the AER and IPART are undertaking their own investigations into the transmission outage and resulting electricity outages emergency.<sup>277</sup> While they have different roles at the state and federal level, both agencies have some overlapping regulatory responsibilities.<sup>278</sup> As a result, they have a collaborative relationship and have been communicating about both investigations.<sup>279</sup>
- 3.26 IPART are investigating Transgrid's compliance with its licence conditions during the periods of the outages, including their obligations regarding reliability and the management and maintenance of their assets and safety risks. It is also investigating whether there was a breach of their regulatory obligations under NSW law, the circumstances of the tower failures, backup generators, and any other relevant matters such as restoring the towers.<sup>280</sup> Witnesses from IPART told us that part of their investigation is whether Transgrid breached their reporting obligations when they knew that one generator was not functional.<sup>281</sup>
- 3.27 The AER is also investigating the electricity outages with a focus on whether there was any breaches of the NER, including requirements that transmission and

<sup>274</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 27; [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 5 April 2025, p 4.

<sup>275</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 35.

<sup>276</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 30.

<sup>277</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 22; [Submission 43](#), p 5.

<sup>278</sup> Mr Justin Oliver, Deputy Chair, AER, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 28.

<sup>279</sup> Justin Oliver, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 28.

<sup>280</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 22; Mr Jonathan Coppel, Tribunal Member, IPART, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>281</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 35.

distribution network service providers (NSPs) ensure their systems and infrastructure are properly operated and maintained.<sup>282</sup>

- 3.28 At the time of writing, both IPART's and the AER's investigations are ongoing and no determinations or enforcement actions have been taken by either agency. Mr Jonathan Coppel, Tribunal Member, IPART, described the investigation as 'in-depth' and said it is expected to take months to complete.<sup>283</sup> Given these agencies' important roles, questions regarding compliance or non-compliance with regulatory obligations and licences should be determined by these investigations.

## Enforcement powers of the regulatory agencies

### Recommendation 1

**That the NSW Government consider amending the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* to provide the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) the enforcement power to order a network operator to compensate affected downstream customers, where IPART is satisfied that the operator has contravened a condition of its licence.**

- 3.29 Both the AER and IPART have a range of enforcement powers available to them to ensure compliance with the electricity regulatory framework.
- 3.30 In accordance with their Compliance and Enforcement Policy,<sup>284</sup> the AER can use a range of tools including administrative actions, regulatory waivers, infringement notices, court enforceable undertakings and civil proceedings.<sup>285</sup> Mr Justin Oliver, Deputy Chair, AER, noted that their investigations may not always result in a final report. If they find there has been a contravention, they may decide to file proceedings in the Federal Court or take other enforcement actions.<sup>286</sup>
- 3.31 Likewise, IPART also has a range of compliance and enforcement powers available.<sup>287</sup> Any enforcement decision is made under a risk-based compliance and enforcement framework.<sup>288</sup>
- 3.32 Some inquiry participants called on Transgrid to pay compensation for the outages.<sup>289</sup> However, neither AER or IPART are legally empowered to seek compensation from network providers for the impacts of power outages. Mr Oliver referred to the possibility of reaching an agreement with a NSP that could require an enforceable undertaking to provide some form of redress.<sup>290</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>282</sup> [Submission 43](#), p 5.

<sup>283</sup> Jonathan Coppel, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 35.

<sup>284</sup> AER, [AER Compliance and enforcement policy](#), July 2021, viewed 8 April 2025.

<sup>285</sup> [Submission 43](#), p 4.

<sup>286</sup> Justin Oliver, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 35.

<sup>287</sup> Jonathan Coppel, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 28.

<sup>288</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 13; IPART, [Compliance and Enforcement Policy](#), December 2017, viewed 21 May 2025.

<sup>289</sup> Rita Bruggy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6; Jennifer Thwaites, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 3.

<sup>290</sup> Justin Oliver, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 30-31.



Mr Coppel clarified that, while IPART can also receive enforceable undertakings, it is not able to order compensation.<sup>291</sup>

- 3.33 We heard that some affected residents received a little financial relief for the outages emergency through their billing arrangements. While Essential Energy waived their daily Network Access Charge and asked that this be passed on by retailers to impacted customers, it is ultimately up to retailers to determine whether to reduce their charges.<sup>292</sup>
- 3.34 Compensation may be payable to energy customers if there has been a breach of Essential Energy's Guaranteed Service Level Scheme.<sup>293</sup> However, Essential Energy argued that these service levels were not breached because the outages and load shedding were excluded.<sup>294</sup>
- 3.35 As discussed in Chapter Two, the outages caused significant financial losses across the region. Despite this, if either investigation determines there has been a licence contravention or breach of the regulatory framework, neither agency can order compensation for affected customers. The Committee views this as a key gap in the regulatory framework, which could result in individuals, communities and taxpayers bearing the cost burden of contraventions by electricity network service providers. Therefore, we recommend that the NSW Government consider amending the Electricity Supply Act to give IPART the enforcement power to order a network operator to compensate affected downstream customers, where the Tribunal is satisfied that the operator has contravened a condition of their licence.

## Regulatory requirements for energy service providers in electricity supply emergencies

### Finding 9

**Transgrid failed to notify any government agency, regulator, relevant Emergency Management Committee, local government or downstream customer that one of their two gas turbine generators was offline before the storm event which led to the transmission outage in October 2024. This failure had consequences for the emergency response and the community's preparedness for the outages.**

### Finding 10

**There is no clear legal obligation for Transgrid to proactively inform any regulatory or government body regarding the decision made to take one of the gas turbine generators offline.**

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<sup>291</sup> Jonathan Coppel, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 31.

<sup>292</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, pp 18-19.

<sup>293</sup> Essential Energy, [Distribution Licence](#), Instrument of Variation of Conditions of Distributor's Licence, *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (NSW), 22 September 2023, cl 5.

<sup>294</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 8.

## Recommendation 2

**That the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) update the *Incident Reporting – Electricity Networks Reporting Manual* to require network operators to:**

- **Give notification of a 'major incident' to, in addition to the Minister's office, any relevant Emergency Management Committees for the area affected by the incident, and**
- **Impose requirements to report to IPART and any relevant Emergency Management Committees of any business or operational decision that may impact the effective implementation of the operator's 'safety management system', even if that impact is temporary.**

3.36 Under the regulatory framework including the Electricity Supply Act and the NER, network operators must comply with notification and reporting requirements for certain incidents. In NSW, network operators are required by their licence to comply with any reporting manuals published by IPART. Network operators must report on their asset maintenance obligations under the '*Electricity Networks Reporting Manual – Safety management system performance measurement*'.<sup>295</sup>

3.37 Relevantly, under the '*Electricity Networks Reporting Manual – Incident Reporting*' (the 'Incident Reporting Manual'), network operators must report incidents which impact the reliability and power quality of their electricity network.<sup>296</sup> Under the Incident Reporting Manual, operators must report an event which meets the reporting threshold but this will depend on which of the following four categories applies: 'major incident', 'incident', 'serious electricity works accident – other' and 'significant near miss'.<sup>297</sup>

### **What is a 'major incident' under IPART's Incident Reporting Manual?<sup>298</sup>**

Under IPART's Incident Reporting Manual, a major incident impacting reliability and power quality is one which causes a widespread energy supply interruption. Specifically, it covers an interruption:

- where a state of emergency has been declared under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*, due to the impact of an outage,
- the cause of a declared state of emergency places the network at risk of loss of supply/failure,
- the network operator (i.e. the distribution or transmission network service provider) has classified it as a significant outage due to the adverse impact or disruption to the community,
- where a reliability or power quality issue resulted in a disruption, for greater than 2 hours, to the normal functioning of significant community infrastructure e.g. hospitals, road tunnels, travel on rail and airport transport systems,
- a distribution interruption impacting over 5,000 customers for more than four hours, or

<sup>295</sup> IPART, [Electricity networks reporting manual – Safety management system performance measurement](#), October 2023.

<sup>296</sup> IPART, [Electricity networks reporting manual – Incident reporting](#), October 2024.

<sup>297</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 12.

<sup>298</sup> IPART, [Electricity networks reporting manual – Incident reporting](#), October 2024, pp 16-17.

- a transmission interruption amounting to over 0.25 'System Minutes' for the transmission network service provider.

- 3.38 A network operator must report 'major incidents' to the Minister for Energy within 24 hours and to IPART within 14 calendar days (unless it involves a reportable fire), but doesn't have to report to any Emergency Management Committees.<sup>299</sup> Given the critical importance of timely information in emergency management, the Committee recommends that the Incident Report Manual be amended to also require network operators to report a 'major incident' to any relevant Emergency Management Committee alongside the Minister within 24 hours.<sup>300</sup>
- 3.39 Reporting on the status of the backup generators was a key issue raised in the inquiry. Transgrid acknowledged that they did not publicly communicate that one of the two backup generators was offline until the outages had already begun.<sup>301</sup> Relevant agencies and network operators, including DCCEEW, IPART, Broken Hill City Council and Essential Energy, were not aware one generator was offline before the outages emergency.<sup>302</sup>
- 3.40 Mr Butler MP told us that community members had assumed that the two backup generators were going to be available to provide the backup power.<sup>303</sup> The failure to communicate about the unavailability of a generator was seen by some as a key failure of the emergency.<sup>304</sup> Mr Jay Nankivell, General Manager of Broken Hill City Council said that the Council did not initially understand the severity of the outage because they were not well informed by Transgrid, particularly about the status of the offline generator.<sup>305</sup>
- 3.41 Although there is also nothing in the rules preventing Transgrid from communicating the status of their backup power,<sup>306</sup> IPART confirmed that Transgrid was not required to report or notify agencies that one generator was offline for maintenance unless it changes how they operate the network or impacts their ability to meet the Reliability Standard.<sup>307</sup> A witness from DCCEEW noted that, while they monitor maintenance of transmission assets under the

<sup>299</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), IPART, 3 April 2025, pp 3-4.

<sup>300</sup> A witness from DCCEEW acknowledged that the transmission outage caused by the storm was deemed a 'major incident' on the morning of 17 October 2024, when information about the extent of the physical infrastructure damage was first reported to him. See Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 40.

<sup>301</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 80-81.

<sup>302</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 30; Mr Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 39; David Nardi, Head of Major Projects and Transmission Services, Essential Energy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 75; Tom Kennedy, Mayor, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 51.

<sup>303</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>304</sup> John Braes, Acting General Manager, Perilya, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 25; Margot Muscat, President, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 8; Tom Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 53.

<sup>305</sup> Jay Nankivell, General Manager, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 50, 52.

<sup>306</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 32.

<sup>307</sup> Kelly Kwan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 30; Andrew Nicholls, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 34.

NEM, they weren't aware of the generator's status since it was a redundancy asset.<sup>308</sup>

- 3.42 Transgrid acknowledged that, although not required by regulations, communicating about the offline status of the backup generator was 'something we should have done' and a 'key learning'.<sup>309</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, DCCEEW also recognised that this was a lesson for how the Department collects information about backup power supply during outages.<sup>310</sup> IPART also informed us that they are considering recommending changes to the regulatory framework including Reporting Manuals as part of their investigation.<sup>311</sup> The Committee also concludes that the reporting requirements for network operators need to be reformed so regulatory agencies and emergency management agencies are aware of changes to electricity infrastructure that condition may impact energy reliability. The Committee has also recommended amending the Incident Reporting Manual to require network operators to report to IPART and any relevant Emergency Management Committees of any business or operational decision that could impact the efficacy of their 'safety management system'.<sup>312</sup> This should include decisions that are intended to have a temporary impact.

## Long-term strategies to improve reliability and resilience of the Far West electricity system

### The long-term backup strategy

#### Finding 11

**Approved through a rigorous regulatory investment test and approvals process, the novel Hydrostor Silver City A-CAES project is intended to strengthen the overall reliability of the Far West electricity system once completed in approximately late 2028. However, given the existing vulnerability of the grid, the region should not be reliant on any single source of backup power for adequate redundancy in the event the grid is disconnected from the National Electricity Market.**

- 3.43 The electricity outages emergency from October 2024 highlighted the importance of long-term strategies to improve energy reliability in the Far West region.

<sup>308</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 39.

<sup>309</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 81.

<sup>310</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 39.

<sup>311</sup> Jonathan Coppel, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>312</sup> Under clause 5 of the [Electricity Supply \(Safety and Network Management\) Regulation 2014](#), the operator of a transmission or distribution system network must 'take all reasonable steps to ensure that the design, construction, commissioning, operation and decommissioning of its network (or any part of its network) is safe'. Clauses 6-7 outlines that mandatory safety management systems can assist the network operator to comply with this safety obligation. Clause 7 requires a network operator's safety management system to deal with some listed matters including the *reliability* of their network.

Again, Transgrid commenced a RIT-T in 2018.<sup>313</sup> This process was finalised in 2022.<sup>314</sup>

#### Why and how is a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) done?

The RIT-T is an assessment performed by network service providers to identify investment options for transmission infrastructure, which maximises economic benefits and ensures the provider can meet the relevant electricity reliability standards.<sup>315</sup> The RIT-T process is done because the NER requires transmission operators to undertake cost benefit analyses before making significant investments in transmission infrastructure. The AER provides guidelines to ensure that a range of options are assessed to determine the most cost-effective one which addresses the specific needs in the electricity system.<sup>316</sup> The RIT-T must be undertaken in accordance with these guidelines.

Transgrid commenced a RIT-T process in 2019 to evaluate different options to maintain reliable electricity supply for Broken Hill. The RIT-T identified several options and explained why their preferred long term solution was most appropriate. The RIT-T is an evaluation process used to justify investment in transmission infrastructure and meet reliability obligations. The RIT-T does not in itself approve any projects and chosen infrastructure solutions require separate approvals.

- 3.44 Transgrid undertook the RIT-T to meet their Reliability Standard. Different options were assessed by the RIT-T, including building another transmission line, the refurbishment and long-term use of the existing gas turbine generators, other non-network solutions provided by third parties and establishing new diesel-powered turbines.<sup>317</sup> The RIT-T determined that the most cost-effective long-term option for backup supply would be network support from Hydrostor's proposed Silver City A-CAES facility and microgrid.<sup>318</sup>
- 3.45 Transgrid confirmed they intend to decommission the existing backup generators once the A-CAES is completed,<sup>319</sup> which should be by Q4 of 2028.<sup>320</sup> However, the A-CAES has been delayed, from an initial expected completion date of 2025/2026 before Hydrostor extended this expected completion date to 2028.<sup>321</sup> Ms Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid, said that it's still a question for Transgrid whether the generators will be adequate for the interim period until 2028.<sup>322</sup> However, as noted earlier, both generators were recently reported to have successfully provided backup power to the region during the short transition to new permanent transmission infrastructure.<sup>323</sup>
- 3.46 As a storage facility that can simultaneously generate and store energy, the A-CAES is designed to be a large-scale, long duration storage asset that can provide

<sup>313</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 6.

<sup>314</sup> Transgrid, [Maintaining reliable supply to Broken Hill – RIT-T - Project Assessment Conclusions Report](#), 26 May 2022, viewed 24 April 2025.

<sup>315</sup> AER, [Regulatory investment test for transmission \(RIT-T\) and application guidelines 2010](#), accessed 11 April 2025.

<sup>316</sup> [Submission 43](#), p 3.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid*, pp 7-8.

<sup>318</sup> [Submission 28](#), p 6.

<sup>319</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 79.

<sup>320</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Hydrostor, 28 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>321</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Transgrid, 31 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>322</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 79.

<sup>323</sup> Transgrid, [Transgrid safely energises new permanent section of Broken Hill transmission line](#), media release, 12 May 2025, viewed 16 May 2025.

backup power supply.<sup>324</sup> It works by storing excess renewable energy and releasing it into the grid when needed.<sup>325</sup> Jon Norman, President, Hydrostor, said that the A-CAES is intended to provide a backup solution that is much greater than what is currently available, while also providing system stability.<sup>326</sup>

- 3.47 Some inquiry participants raised concerns about the proposed A-CAES project as the long-term redundancy plan, highlighting its novel and untested technology.<sup>327</sup> Central Darling Shire Council noted the importance of combining different technologies to ensure long-term reliability.<sup>328</sup> Tilt Renewables also emphasised that future energy resilience will depend on solutions that combine traditional infrastructure with emerging technologies.<sup>329</sup>
- 3.48 Transgrid confirmed that they do not intend to solely rely on the A-CAES project, and that their proposed long-term solution would operate with the other renewable energy generation assets in the region during any outages, as part of a local microgrid.<sup>330</sup> This means configuring the existing Tilt Renewables' wind and solar farms so they can assist in future transmission outages.<sup>331</sup>
- 3.49 The A-CAES was chosen by Transgrid as the best long-term solution to maintain reliable power through the RIT-T, and has planning approval from the NSW Government. The NSW Government has also awarded the project a Long Duration Storage Long-Term Energy Service Agreement and provided grant funding under the NSW Emerging Energy Program.<sup>332</sup> However, we agree that the region should not be reliant on any single source of backup power for sufficient redundancy, particularly given the existing vulnerability of the grid.

### **The Generator Performance Standards limiting other energy generation and storage providers acting in an emergency**

#### **Finding 12**

**The Far West region has several existing alternative energy generation and storage providers. However, due to the existing Generator Performance Standards of these assets, these projects cannot be operated to support the grid when it is islanded.**

#### **Recommendation 3**

**That the NSW Minister for Energy, through the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, advocate to the Australian Energy Market Operator to consider possible changes to the Generator Performance Standards for the AGL**

<sup>324</sup> Jon Norman, President, Hydrostor, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 71.

<sup>325</sup> [Submission 42](#), Hydrostor, p 4.

<sup>326</sup> Mr Jon Norman, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 71.

<sup>327</sup> Rob Gregory, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 19; [Submission 36](#), Outback Astronomy, pp 4-5.

<sup>328</sup> [Submission 4](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 6.

<sup>329</sup> [Submission 25](#), Tilt Renewable, p 4.

<sup>330</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 8.

<sup>331</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 8.

<sup>332</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 10.



**and Tilt Renewable assets in the Far West region which would permit the operation of those assets when in islanded mode.**

- 3.50 As noted in Chapter One, the Far West region includes two renewable energy generation farms operated by Tilt Renewables, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) operated by AGL and rooftop solar. These assets play a role in providing energy security for the Far West. However, we heard that, during the transmission outages, they are automatically disconnected so did not operate.<sup>333</sup> A major issue is that the solar and wind farms and AGL's BESS are prohibited by their Generator Performance Standards (GPS) from operating when the X2 line is disconnected from the NEM.<sup>334</sup>

**What are Generator Performance Standards (GPS)?**

A GPS regulates how each asset can operate in the network. It is a complex document that describes how each asset can interact with the grid.<sup>335</sup> Under the NER, every generation asset operating in the NEM must have a GPS. The NER sets out the way that a GPS is developed between the network operator and AEMO.<sup>336</sup> A network operator and AEMO can refuse to agree to a standard in a GPS, if it would adversely affect system security or the quality of power supply.<sup>337</sup>

- 3.51 Stakeholders talked about the need to review the GPSs to ensure that these assets support the grid when it is in islanded mode. Although AGL designed the BESS to support the grid when it's disconnected from the NEM, its GPS requires it to turn off when the system is islanded.<sup>338</sup> This was approved by AEMO under guidance by Transgrid.<sup>339</sup>
- 3.52 During the outages, we heard that bringing the BESS online on 26 October helped avoid more load shedding until the X2 transmission line was restored on 31 October.<sup>340</sup> AGL indicated in their submission that, on 19 October, they had completed their due diligence and were in a position to safely allow the BESS to operate in islanded mode during the outage. Transgrid continued to work with AGL to conduct their own due diligence, to ensure that the BESS was able to operate safely. The BESS was not brought online until Transgrid completed this due diligence on 26 October.<sup>341</sup>
- 3.53 To do so, AGL needed to work through technical and regulatory issues with both Transgrid and AEMO to allow the BESS to operate in islanded mode under limited conditions during the outages.<sup>342</sup> This process of receiving approval from AEMO for a temporary modification to the BESS's GPS took approximately nine days.<sup>343</sup>

<sup>333</sup> [Submission 24](#), p 21.

<sup>334</sup> [Submission 25](#), p 2.

<sup>335</sup> David Bowly, Operations Manager, Battery Energy Storage Systems, AGL, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 67.

<sup>336</sup> Justin Oliver, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>337</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), AER, 15 April 2025, p 4.

<sup>338</sup> John McCormack, General Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, AGL, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 67.

<sup>339</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), AGL, 28 March 2025, pp 2-3.

<sup>340</sup> John McCormack, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 67.

<sup>341</sup> [Submission 29](#), AGL, pp 3-5.

<sup>342</sup> [Submission 29](#), AGL, pp 3-5; David Bowly, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 69.

<sup>343</sup> David Bowly, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 69.

- 3.54 AGL emphasised that the BESS can play an important long-term role but the battery's GPS needs to be changed in order for it to be able to operate in future outages.<sup>344</sup> Transgrid has confirmed that they are currently working with AGL for a formal GPS approval, to enable the BESS to operate in any future transmission outage.<sup>345</sup>
- 3.55 Likewise, Tilt Renewables also highlighted that the GPS for their wind farm and solar farm prevented the farms from generating power to the region when disconnected from the NEM.<sup>346</sup> This may be due to risks of voltage instability and an inability to maintain grid frequency.<sup>347</sup> As discussed, these renewable energy assets will help future grid security. Tilt Renewables stated that their assets can be modified to provide additional power to the Far West grid when islanded. This is in line with Transgrid's ultimate conclusions from the RIT-T process.<sup>348</sup> However, their GPS would also need to change so they can operate in islanded mode. Tilt Renewables are working with Transgrid to make this happen.<sup>349</sup>
- 3.56 The Committee therefore recommends that the Minister, through the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, advocate to AEMO to consider possible changes to the GPS for these assets in the Far West region which would permit them to operate when the grid is islanded.

## Establishing microgrids in the region

### Finding 13

**When power outages affect the remote towns in the Far West region of NSW outside of Broken Hill, the residents of these towns face greater periods without power as their geographical isolation present additional challenges to repairing faults to their power supply. These residents would benefit from establishing 'microgrids' in their towns to provide them with an independent source of backup power, to minimise the time periods they are without power while faults are being addressed.**

### Recommendation 4

**That the NSW Government continue to investigate options for facilitating and supporting the establishment of 'microgrids' for the towns in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area. This could include supporting applications or applying to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency's Regional Microgrids Program for funding to establish renewable energy-powered microgrids in the remote towns in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area, particularly to support the Aboriginal communities in the region.**

- 3.57 As discussed in Chapter Two, the remote towns outside of Broken Hill experience more frequent and severe power outages and the impact of these outages are made worse by the distances between these towns. This makes the

<sup>344</sup> John McCormack, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 67; David Bowly, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 70.

<sup>345</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 3.

<sup>346</sup> [Submission 25](#), p 2.

<sup>347</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Tilt Renewables, 4 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>348</sup> [Submission 25](#), p 3.

<sup>349</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Tilt Renewables, pp 1-2.

electricity system more complex for already vulnerable communities.<sup>350</sup> We heard that Essential Energy is progressing a number of initiatives to improve energy security and reliability for the region. These include replacing distribution power lines from the Pinnacles Place substation,<sup>351</sup> and working with Regional Development Australia Far West to improve energy infrastructure across the Unincorporated Area through the NSW Government's Growing Regional Economies Fund.<sup>352</sup>

- 3.58 These remote communities may also benefit from independent power sources, and many stakeholders expressed their support for developing microgrids to improve energy resilience, by ensuring there is power when distribution or transmission infrastructure is disrupted.<sup>353</sup> Mr Butler highlighted microgrids as a good solution for remote areas, particularly given the existing difficulties with accessing sites to repair infrastructure.<sup>354</sup>
- 3.59 We heard that network operators are exploring these strategies. Essential Energy have initiatives relating to microgrids, given that many remote towns in the region require localised generation and energy storage solutions.<sup>355</sup> These initiatives, one of which has already prevented an outage in Tibooburra,<sup>356</sup> include:
- Installing and connecting a microgrid in Tibooburra, which currently runs on an auto-start diesel generator but is intended to operate as a solar and battery microgrid once completed by 2027.<sup>357</sup>
  - Trialling microgrids for Wilcannia and Menindee, subject to funding from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) through their Regional Microgrids Program.<sup>358</sup> ARENA plays an important role in funding the development of microgrids through two microgrids funding programs: one for the development of regional microgrids and a second for microgrids to support First Nations communities.<sup>359</sup>
- 3.60 DCCEEW told us that they are working with Essential Energy and Transgrid to identify support to accelerate their microgrid project. They will continue to

<sup>350</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 2; [Submission 42](#), p 1.

<sup>351</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 11.

<sup>352</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), RDA Far West, 28 March 2025, pp 3,5.

<sup>353</sup> [Submission 11](#), Barbara Webster, p 1; [Submission 16](#), p 4; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 3; [Submission 25](#), p 4; [Submission 27](#), p 13; [Submission 33](#), p 3; [Submission 41](#), NSW Farmers Western Division Council, p 1; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 3; Dick Wagner, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 2; Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 2, 5; Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 5; Barbara Webster, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>354</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 2, 4-5. See also [Answers to questions](#), RDA Far West, p 3.

<sup>355</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 12.

<sup>356</sup> Annie Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 73.

<sup>357</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 15.

<sup>358</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Essential Energy, p 12.

<sup>359</sup> Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), [Regional Microgrids Program](#), viewed 14 April 2025.

consider measures to improve resilience including helping communities access clean energy programs.<sup>360</sup>

- 3.61 The Committee supports this work and has recommended that the NSW Government continue to investigate options for facilitating and supporting establishing microgrids for towns in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area. This could include supporting applications like Essential Energy's or applying to ARENA directly for funding to establish renewable energy-powered microgrids in these remote towns, particularly to support the Aboriginal communities in the region.

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<sup>360</sup> [Answers to questions](#), DCCEEW, p 11.

## Chapter Four – Emergency management in the Far West

### The roles and responsibilities of state and local government in the electricity outages emergency

#### An overview of NSW's emergency management framework

- 4.1 The NSW emergency management framework is complex and highly structured, particularly as it relates to electricity supply emergencies. Emergency management in NSW is governed by the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (the 'SERM Act')<sup>361</sup> which sets out the responsibilities of government at state, regional and local levels. This framework intends for the response and recovery to emergencies to be managed at the lowest effective level of coordination, but can be escalated for necessary regional or state support due to the size and severity of the emergency.<sup>362</sup>
- 4.2 This tiered structure for emergency management is set out in the State Emergency Management Plan ('State EMPLAN'),<sup>363</sup> as required by section 12 of the SERM Act.<sup>364</sup> The State EMPLAN is further supported by other state-level plans: subplans for a specific hazard, and functional area supporting plans.<sup>365</sup> These plans define the responsibilities of the agency responsible for leading the response to a specified hazard (the 'combat agency') and outline how various agencies support the coordinated response and/or recovery to emergencies.<sup>366</sup>
- 4.3 In addition to the State EMPLAN, the SERM Act also establishes the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC),<sup>367</sup> and sets out the role of Regional Emergency Management Committees (REMCs) and Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs).<sup>368</sup> Both the State EMPLAN and the NSW Recovery Plan provide for the establishment of a State Recovery Committee and set out the roles of Recovery Committees at regional and local levels.<sup>369</sup>

<sup>361</sup> [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#).

<sup>362</sup> NSW Government, [Local Emergency Management Committee Handbook](#) ('LEMC Handbook'), October 2024, pp 4, 31; NSW Government, [State Emergency Management Plan \(EMPLAN\)](#) ('State EMPLAN'), December 2023, p 11.

<sup>363</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#).

<sup>364</sup> [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#) s 12.

<sup>365</sup> NSW Government, [LEMC Handbook](#), p 4. Note that 'functional area' is defined in s 3 of the SERM Act to refer to a particular type of service involved in emergency preparedness and response. For example, telecommunications services, energy and utility services, health services and public information services.

<sup>366</sup> NSW Government, [LEMC Handbook](#), p 4.

<sup>367</sup> [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#) ss 14-16.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid*, ss 22-23, 28-29.

<sup>369</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#), pp 65-66; NSW Government, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), December 2023, pp 13-17.

### **What are the different committees under the NSW emergency response and recovery framework?**

#### State Emergency Committee (SEMC)

The State Emergency Committee (SEMC) is the peak committee which develops and oversees emergency management policy in NSW. The roles and functions of the SEMC are translated as appropriate through Regional Emergency Management Committees at the regional level and through Local Emergency Management Committees at the local level.<sup>370</sup>

#### Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC)

The REMC brings together local councils and local emergency services representatives from the relevant region. Each REMC consists of:

- the Regional Emergency Operations Controller (REOCON) for the region, who is also the Chair of the REMC,
- the Chair of the LEMC for each LGA in the region,
- a senior representative of each Emergency Services Organisation operating in the region,
- a representative of each Functional Area, where determined appropriate by the respective state-level Functional Area representative on the SEMC, and
- representatives of any other agency or organisation as determined by the REMC.<sup>371</sup>

#### Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC)

The LEMC facilitates communication between emergency services, Functional Areas, local government and the community.<sup>372</sup> The LEMC is a planning committee and not a response management committee. However, the LEMC does have responsibilities for recovery.<sup>373</sup>

Each LEMC is chaired by a Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO), who is a senior officer appointed by the local council.<sup>374</sup> The LEMO supports both the LEMC and the REOCON by coordinating local logistics, communication and stakeholder engagement.<sup>375</sup> Membership of the LEMC often include local representatives from emergency services organisations like NSW Police Force, Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW Rural Fire Service, Ambulance NSW, the NSW State Emergency Service and NSW Volunteer Rescue Association.<sup>376</sup>

- 4.4 Under the SERM Act, the Regional Emergency Operations Controller (REOCON) is the Chair of any Regional Emergency Management Committee and is required to establish and control a Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC).<sup>377</sup> Similarly, at a local level, the Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON) is required to establish and control a Local Emergency Operations Centre (LEOC).<sup>378</sup> An Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) is a centre for communication and coordination of operations and support provided during an emergency.<sup>379</sup>

### **The roles and responsibilities for the emergency response to the electricity outages**

- 4.5 Under the State EMPLAN, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEE) is the lead combat agency for electricity

<sup>370</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#), p 16.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, December 2023, pp 23-24.

<sup>372</sup> NSW Government, [LEMC Handbook](#), p 6.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, p 31.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, p 12.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, pp 7-8, 12.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p 18.

<sup>377</sup> [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#), ss 22, 24-25.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, ss 30-31.

<sup>379</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#), p 88.



supply emergencies.<sup>380</sup> The Energy and Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA) within the Department is responsible for controlling and coordinating electricity supply emergency management measures, and for managing the flow of information between key stakeholders relating to 'a potential or actual' energy emergency. EUSFA has responsibilities relating to the prevention and preparedness for, and response and recovery to electricity supply emergencies.<sup>381</sup>

4.6 On 17 October 2024, the NSW Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan ('the Sub Plan')<sup>382</sup> was partially activated in response to the major transmission outage affecting Far West NSW.<sup>383</sup> This Sub Plan is to be read with the Energy and Utility Services Functional Area Supporting Plan,<sup>384</sup> and supported by the NSW Recovery Plan with respect to recovery from electricity supply emergencies.<sup>385</sup>

4.7 The Committee heard that the Jurisdictional System Security Coordinator under DCCEEW is the 'primary incident controller' with lead responsibility for coordinating the electricity supply response and recovery for the Far West emergency from 17 October 2024.<sup>386</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, DCCEEW explained that, as the Jurisdictional System Security Coordinator, his role includes requesting the State Emergency Operations Controller to 'coordinate the consequence management and response to the emergency's impact on the community.'<sup>387</sup> He highlighted the distinct nature of electricity supply emergencies, noting that:

... in some other kinds of emergencies, the incident controller takes a much more active role in consequence management. In this specific instance, in electricity supply emergencies, the incident controller is really focused on restoring power.<sup>388</sup>

4.8 Mr Jamie Caldwell, EUSFA Coordinator (EUSFAC) under DCCEEW, also told us about his role in the emergency management side of the outages emergency.<sup>389</sup> The EUSFAC also coordinates resources and communications with the agencies managing the emergency.<sup>390</sup>

4.9 The emergency impacted an area covering the two local government areas (LGAs) of Broken Hill and Central Darling Shire, as well as the Unincorporated Area. As a result, the Regional Emergency Operations Controller (REOCON), Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM, who is the NSW Police Force Regional Commander for the Western Region Office, stood up the REMC once informed of

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid, pp 105-106.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, pp 105-106.

<sup>382</sup> NSW Government, [State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan](#), June 2024.

<sup>383</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 7.

<sup>384</sup> See NSW Government, [NSW Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Supporting Plan](#), October 2022.

<sup>385</sup> NSW Government, [State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan](#), pp 5, 21.

<sup>386</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>387</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>388</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>389</sup> Mr Jamie Caldwell, Director, Energy Operations, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, DCCEEW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 36.

<sup>390</sup> NSW Government, [NSW Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Supporting Plan](#), October 2022, pp 11-12.

the major power outage by the EUSFAC.<sup>391</sup> This escalated the emergency response to the regional level, and the LEMCs for Central Darling Shire, Broken Hill City and the Unincorporated Area were present for daily REMC meetings.<sup>392</sup> Therefore, the relevant emergency management agencies for the Far West emergency was the Far West REOCON and REMC.<sup>393</sup>

- 4.10 When it is decided that the emergency response phase should transition to the recovery phase, disaster recovery begins. However, this recovery phase can begin while relief activities are still ongoing and can continue long after the response phase ends.<sup>394</sup> Recovery efforts, including establishing a Regional Recovery Committee, are coordinated through the NSW Reconstruction Authority (the 'Reconstruction Authority')<sup>395</sup> which leads recovery and reconstruction from disasters and emergencies across NSW. The role and work of the Reconstruction Authority is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

#### What is the difference between the 'response' and 'recovery' phase of an emergency?

Section 5 of the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* defines the following stages in relation to an emergency:

- Prevention—includes the identification of hazards, the assessment of threats to life and property and the taking of measures to reduce potential loss to life or property,
- Preparation—includes arrangements or plans to deal with an emergency or the effects of an emergency,
- Response—includes the process of combating an emergency and of providing immediate relief for persons affected by an emergency,
- Recovery—includes the process of returning an affected community to its proper level of functioning after an emergency.<sup>396</sup>

While these four phases (known as 'PPRR') can overlap,<sup>397</sup> the State EMPLAN notes that the transition from response to recovery should occur when the priority shifts 'from protecting human life and supporting the immediate needs of the community to establishing longer term, more sustainable recovery arrangements.'<sup>398</sup>

## Response to and management of the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency

- 4.11 The response to the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency impacting Far West from October 2024 involved multiple different government agencies, local councils, energy and telecommunications services providers, emergency services organisations and non-governmental community-based organisations. Some key response actions taken to the emergency are outlined below, but the Committee recognises that it does not capture the significant mobilised efforts of affected communities to respond to the

<sup>391</sup> Mr Andrew Holland, APM, Assistant Commissioner, NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8.

<sup>392</sup> [Submission 4](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 2.

<sup>393</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>394</sup> NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), pp 28 -29.

<sup>395</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9.

<sup>396</sup> [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#) s 5.

<sup>397</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#), p 8.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, p 60.

emergency. The support and resilience shown by communities across the Far West is discussed in Chapter Six.

- 4.12 As discussed, on the morning of 17 October 2024, DCCEEW was notified as the combat agency of the widespread power outage and partially activated the Sub Plan. The Department had received photographs and damage reports from Transgrid.<sup>399</sup> The Department also requested that a SEMC meeting be convened.<sup>400</sup> The EUSFA Coordinator (EUSFAC) under DCCEEW then began coordinating with Assistant Commissioner Holland, as the REOCON, on 17 October, who responded by convening the REMC.<sup>401</sup> Broken Hill City Council clarified that the first REMC meeting they attended was held on 19 October.<sup>402</sup> We were also told that Central Darling Shire Council stood up their LEMC on the same afternoon the incident began.<sup>403</sup> The Central Darling Local EOC and the Far West Regional EOC were opened that same afternoon and operated virtually.<sup>404</sup>
- 4.13 NSW State Emergency Service (SES) confirmed that they had a dedicated liaison officer in both Emergency Management Committees and EOCs.<sup>405</sup>
- 4.14 The NSW Telco Authority ('Telco Authority') reported initiating an operational response after they were notified of the significant power outage by EUSFA on 17 October 2024. As a result, the Authority's Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit (TEMU) took part in the REMC meetings, and coordinated information sharing with EUSFA, emergency services organisations and commercial Mobile Network Operators to manage the emergency response.<sup>406</sup>
- 4.15 As discussed in Chapter Three, load shedding was done by Essential Energy on the directions of Transgrid because there was insufficient backup power supply to meet peak customer demand. This first occurred on 18 October 2024.<sup>407</sup>
- 4.16 The NSW Government informed us that generators, fuel pods, cool rooms, lighting towers, satellite connections, food and other essential amenities were transported to the Far West region as part of the coordinated response.<sup>408</sup> The NSW SES reported both the Broken Hill Unit and Mid-West Units delivered portable generators and pallets of food hampers and water to locations around the Far West region.<sup>409</sup> Transport for NSW's use of the generators, fuel and other equipment were in line with its internal Emergency Management arrangements and support as requested by the EUSFAC and the Far West REOCON.<sup>410</sup>

<sup>399</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 36-37.

<sup>400</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 7.

<sup>401</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>402</sup> [Letter of clarification](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 1.

<sup>403</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Central Darling Shire Council, 17 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>404</sup> [Letter of clarification](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 4.

<sup>405</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW State Emergency Service, 1 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>406</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Telco Authority, 3 April 2025, p 6.

<sup>407</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6.

<sup>408</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8.

<sup>409</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW State Emergency Service, pp 1-2.

<sup>410</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), Transport for NSW, 3 April 2025, p 2.

- 4.17 Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie, Strategic Capability, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) also confirmed that they deployed a number of assets for communications and fuel support from Sydney to aid the Far West brigades particularly in their efforts to support their local communities.<sup>411</sup>
- 4.18 Graeme McCrabb, Captain of the Menindee Headquarters RFS Brigade told us that state headquarters contacted him on 17 October to see what support was needed and confirmed they received generators, fuel, and Starlink satellite units from state headquarters. These assets arrived two days later on 19 October, due to the remote locations, and was shared with affected communities where possible.<sup>412</sup> As critical sites ran out of power, we heard that local RFS brigades took proactive measures to power fuel stations and other essential services.<sup>413</sup>
- 4.19 The RFS also provided additional Starlink units to various organisations, at the request of the REMC on 23 October 2024.<sup>414</sup> We also heard that additional generators were provided by Essential Energy to households in need, but privacy laws created challenges to identifying these residents and therefore delayed the distribution of these generators.<sup>415</sup>
- 4.20 A situation report provided by Broken Hill City Council highlighted that checks on vulnerable persons and isolated communities were done by the local RFS, NSW Police Force's Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers and members of the Central Darling LEMC EOC.<sup>416</sup>
- 4.21 As discussed earlier, the Committee heard about the failure of Telstra mobile towers during the emergency. We heard that Telstra provided and activated generators for the towers on 22 October but some were then prematurely disconnected when backup power was thought to be stable, leading to further telecommunications outages.<sup>417</sup>
- 4.22 Telstra reported that they activated their National Emergency Management Team, which coordinated with the NSW Telco Authority and State EOC. They also dispatched field teams to restore service where safely possible, and supplied temporary infrastructure, including portable satellite units and mobile charging stations in partnership with local government and NGOs.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Mr Peter McKechnie, Deputy Commissioner, Strategic Capability, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8.

<sup>412</sup> Graeme McCrabb, Captain, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>413</sup> Rob Gregory, Volunteer and Contractor, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 16; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade NSW, 7 February 2025, p 2; Peter McKechnie, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8; Rob Woods, Secretary, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 16;

<sup>414</sup> Peter McKechnie, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8.

<sup>415</sup> [Submission 15](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 5; Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>416</sup> [Letter of clarification](#), Broken Hill City Council, 24 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>417</sup> [Submission 16](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 1.

<sup>418</sup> [Submission 46](#), Telstra, pp 2-3.

- 4.23 As the situation evolved, the Premier had to use more formal emergency powers under the *Electricity Supply Act 1995*, by declaring an 'Electricity Supply Emergency' on 23 October 2024.<sup>419</sup> This declaration allowed the Minister for Energy to give directions to respond to the emergency, including directing additional emergency services operations to mobilise. However, we heard that the Minister did not need to issue such directions.<sup>420</sup>
- 4.24 Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, highlighted the visits by the Premier to Broken Hill on 22 October and the Minister for Energy across the Far West region on 25 to 29 October. He noted that communities, particularly isolated ones in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area, were able to informally meet with the Minister for Energy.<sup>421</sup>

## Issues with emergency response and management for the Far West Region

- 4.25 Many inquiry participants raised concerns about the emergency response to the major electricity and telecommunications outages affecting the Far West. These issues are explored further below in this chapter.

### The perceived delay in response actions

#### Finding 14

In some instances, there was significant time between the start of the electricity outages emergency and the delivery of emergency support, including small generators. Such delays may reflect a lack of urgency from relevant agencies involved in emergency management immediately following the storms and resulting damage to the transmission infrastructure on 17 October 2024 and during the initial stages of the emergency. This may indicate a lack of understanding of the additional challenges to emergency management in a remote area like the Far West region.

#### Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government consider incorporating guidance in the State Emergency Management Plan and the NSW Recovery Plan which addresses the unique characteristics of geographically isolated and sparsely populated regions like Far West NSW in coordinating and managing any emergency response and recovery.

- 4.26 The Far West electricity outages in October 2024 exposed serious concerns about the urgency and timeliness of the emergency response in remote locations. Despite existing plans, such as the Sub Plan and the Far West Regional Emergency Management Plan,<sup>422</sup> in some cases the early stages of the incident were marked by slow decision-making. This may indicate a lack of understanding about how severe prolonged power outages can be on remote communities, particularly

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<sup>419</sup> [Electricity Supply Order 2024](#).

<sup>420</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 7.

<sup>421</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 9.

<sup>422</sup> NSW Government, [Far West Regional Emergency Management Plan](#), February 2021.

given its impacts on telecommunications. As noted previously, once residents in the Far West lost mobile and internet access, they were effectively cut off from any contact or information about the emergency and the status of power supply.

4.27 Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon highlighted the significant time it took for emergency management agencies to understand the full extent of the damage.<sup>423</sup> This was reflected in the evidence of Jay Nankivell, General Manager of Broken Hill City Council who told us that, because Council was not informed by Transgrid about the offline status of a backup generator, the Broken Hill EOC was not immediately activated.<sup>424</sup>

4.28 On this issue of delay, Mr Butler MP emphasised that, even with a prompt response, it would still take 24 hours to deliver any support due to the region's geographical isolation and the time needed to load assets.<sup>425</sup> He also recalled his first meeting with Transgrid, Essential Energy and departmental representatives:

... there was a lot of planning and not a lot of decision-making. It was in that meeting that I said, "While we're sitting here talking about it, we should have generators on trucks now, because it's going to take 20 hours to get them out there."<sup>426</sup>

4.29 The Committee recognises that the logistics for emergency management of a vast region with large distances involves inherent challenges but we note that there were delays between the emergency response and the delivery of support to the remote communities. While some of these resulted from delayed information about the unavailability of one backup generator, some delays may reflect a lack of urgency from relevant agencies following the storm and its resulting damage to the transmission infrastructure on 17 October 2024.

4.30 As NSW Farmers submitted, the responses by responsible providers and government agencies needed to be activated both urgently and effectively for the safety and wellbeing of impacted communities.<sup>427</sup> While the emergency framework was technically activated in accordance with the relevant plans in place, its implementation lacked flexibility and urgency for remote areas. The delays in receiving early support undermined public confidence. Stakeholders emphasised that generic plans fail to address the unique characteristics of each town, which resulted in some residents feeling more isolated than others. We were told that there need to be plans that are hazard-specific for each town.<sup>428</sup>

4.31 More targeted emergency planning tailored to population size, geography, infrastructure and demographics is urgently needed. In their submission to this inquiry, the NSW Police Force, Western Region Office argued for developing contingency plans for providing and transporting generator power to isolated

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<sup>423</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>424</sup> Jay Nankivell, General Manager, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 5.

<sup>425</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 7-8.

<sup>426</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>427</sup> [Submission 41](#), NSW Farmers Western Division Council, p 2.

<sup>428</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8; [Submission 15](#), p 9.



communities at short notice, and a communication strategy to combat the difficulties of reaching small, isolated communities.<sup>429</sup>

- 4.32 The Committee agrees that the NSW emergency management framework needs to better consider how the unique characteristics of geographically isolated and sparsely populated regions like the Far West impacts the coordination and management of any emergency response and recovery. We recommend that the NSW Government consider incorporating guidance into the State EMPLAN and the NSW Recovery Plan which addresses these characteristics.

## Confusion about the emergency response management and implementation

### Finding 15

**Stakeholders highlighted several issues regarding the response and management of the electricity emergency, including general confusion about agencies' roles and responsibilities, confusing or poor communications, a lack of local knowledge reflected in the response and inadequate local representation on relevant Emergency Management Committees.**

### Recommendation 6

**That the NSW Government, led by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water, support the development or update of Local and Regional Emergency Management Plans for Broken Hill, Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area, which:**

- **sets out an emergency management plan for each population centre outside Broken Hill,**
- **identifies an electricity supply emergency and its resulting impact on telecommunications as a relevant hazard, and**
- **outlines relevant risk controls and Consequence Management Guides to deal with an electricity supply emergency and its impacts on telecommunications.**

- 4.33 A theme through the inquiry was the confusion expressed by residents and stakeholders about which agencies were responsible for what, and how decisions were made during the crisis.<sup>430</sup> This uncertainty contributed to widespread frustration, anxiety and a sense of powerlessness.<sup>431</sup>
- 4.34 As discussed earlier, EUSFA is the combat agency for electricity supply emergencies but do not take an active role in the 'consequence management' of the emergency (i.e. providing support to help people manage the impacts of the emergency). Therefore, there may be understandable confusion about who is responsible for providing emergency support for the outages emergency.

<sup>429</sup> [Submission 40](#), NSW Police Force Western Region Office, p 1.

<sup>430</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 2; [Submission 12](#), pp 6-7.

<sup>431</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), p 4.

- 4.35 We heard about residents' confusion about the roles and actions of LEMCs and the REMC.<sup>432</sup> Despite the early mobilisation of the Emergency Management Committees during the outages emergency, some residents described feeling abandoned in the initial stages of the emergency and uncertain about where to turn for help, what support was available and which agency was in charge.<sup>433</sup>
- 4.36 Part of the confusion arose from a lack of understanding about who was represented on the LEMC. While essential emergency services organisations such as NSW Police, Rural Fire Service (RFS), and State Emergency Service (SES) are usually always represented, the inclusion of other groups like community-based organisations are usually by invitation.<sup>434</sup>
- 4.37 Graeme McCrabb, Captain of the Menindee RFS Brigade, was critical of the Central Darling Shire LEMC's lack of local knowledge.<sup>435</sup> Residents echoed this concern, stating that emergency efforts were poorly targeted and failed to involve trusted local leaders. Michelle Kelly from Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) highlighted that outside agencies did not have 'local solutions', while local community members with critical knowledge were excluded.<sup>436</sup>
- 4.38 We also heard that representation from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) on the Emergency Management Committees varied. Some Aboriginal government agencies and ACCOs like Maari Ma Aboriginal Health did participate in the LEMC and REMC, contributing to the emergency response.<sup>437</sup> However, Luke Driscoll, CEO of the Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation, was not invited during the 2024 outages despite past participation in the LEMC following the mass fish kills that occurred in Menindee in 2021.<sup>438</sup> Ms Kelly also raised concerns that the LEMC did not include any Aboriginal residents from Menindee.<sup>439</sup> A similar concern was raised in Wilcannia, where Michael Kennedy, Chairperson of the Wilcannia LALC told us that they did not have representation on the LEMC.<sup>440</sup>
- 4.39 Most alarmingly, a number of residents from the smaller, isolated communities outside of Broken Hill did not think there was (or were not aware of) any emergency plan which applied to their town.<sup>441</sup> Ms Kelly from the Menindee LALC advocated for an emergency plan to be put in place for Menindee 'to say, "Okay,

<sup>432</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 7; Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 7; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 5, 7.

<sup>433</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Rosie Siemer, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 19.

<sup>434</sup> NSW Government, [State EMPLAN](#), p 25.

<sup>435</sup> Graeme McCrabb, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>436</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 4-5.

<sup>437</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 3; Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 25-26.

<sup>438</sup> Luke Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer, Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 48.

<sup>439</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 4-5.

<sup>440</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 9.

<sup>441</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Helen Murray, Secretary, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 25; Peter Price, Treasurer, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 25; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8.

this is what we need to do.<sup>442</sup> We heard similar support from residents of Silverton and Wilcannia for an emergency plan for their communities.<sup>443</sup>

4.40 The Committee acknowledges the issues with the emergency management of the outages emergency that have been raised by stakeholders. Given the concerning absence of an emergency management plan tailored for the smaller population centres outside Broken Hill, the Committee believes that Local and Regional Emergency Management Plans for the Far West region should be updated. We therefore recommend that the NSW Government, led by DCCEE, support the development of new or update of existing plans for Broken Hill, Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area, which:

- sets out an emergency management plan for each population centre outside Broken Hill,
- identifies an electricity supply emergency and its related impacts on telecommunications, particularly mobile and internet, as a relevant hazard, and
- outlines relevant risk controls and Consequence Management Guides to deal with an electricity supply emergency and its related impact on mobile and internet telecommunications.

#### Past recommendations relating to emergency management in remote communities

##### Finding 16

**The concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the emergency response to and management of the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency mirror the emergency management issues identified by the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's report entitled 'Independent Review into the 2023 Mass Fish Deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee'.**

##### Recommendation 7

**That the NSW Government, as a matter of priority, implement recommendation 3 of the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's report entitled 'Independent Review into the 2023 Mass Fish Deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee' to cover a broader range of hazards for the Far West region of NSW, particularly electricity and telecommunication outages.**

4.41 These issues with the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages emergency affecting Far West NSW raised in this inquiry are not unique to this emergency. As the Menindee RFS Brigade's submission highlighted, the challenges of communications between agencies and communities during an emergency response was previously identified as an issue by the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer (OCSE).<sup>444</sup>

<sup>442</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>443</sup> Peter Price, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 25; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8.

<sup>444</sup> Graeme McCrabb, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14.

4.42 Many of the problems identified by inquiry participants mirror the findings from the OCSE's report entitled '*Independent review into the 2023 fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee*' (the 'Menindee Fish Deaths Report').<sup>445</sup> This report noted the unclear agency roles, poor coordination between operations and emergency teams, weak triggers for action, and ignored local voices.<sup>446</sup> Recommendation 3 of the Menindee Fish Deaths Report called for establishing a clear, detailed and effective emergency framework at the local level because the current system is 'not well understood at the local level'.<sup>447</sup> It also recommended specifically that:

- there be a simultaneous review of resources for emergency response, including LEMC/REMC membership and training,<sup>448</sup>
- there be resources for better communications planning and education,<sup>449</sup>
- the REMC, LEMC and NSW Government agencies review and update the membership of the LEMC to ensure more appropriate representation,<sup>450</sup>
- the LEMC and any other government agencies involved in any emergency response do an annual resource review, and that the relevant agencies and LEMC with support from the REMC perform a resource capability assessment of emergency services in the remote area of Menindee,<sup>451</sup> and
- the LEMC, the REMC and other agencies responsible for communications jointly develop a communications plan 'that addresses the regional requirements of the community in the Menindee region'.<sup>452</sup>

4.43 Since the issues recognised by stakeholders reflect the findings of the Menindee Fish Deaths Report, we endorse Recommendation 3 of this Report not just as it relates to mass fish deaths but to emergency management in the Far West region more broadly. The Committee notes that the NSW Government supported all of the OCSE's recommendations relating to emergency management that we have highlighted above,<sup>453</sup> and DCCEEW has reported that it has substantially progressed or otherwise completed implementation of those recommendations.<sup>454</sup>

4.44 However, we note that the implementation of those recommendations appear to be specific to the hazard of mass fish deaths, although the issues sought to be

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<sup>445</sup> Office of the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer (OCSE), [\*Independent review into the 2023 fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee\*](#), December 2023.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, pp 65, 70-76.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, p 70.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, p 71.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, pp 73-74.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, p 76.

<sup>453</sup> NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, [\*NSW Government response to the Office of Chief Scientist and Engineer independent review into the 2023 fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee\*](#), June 2024.

<sup>454</sup> NSW Government, [\*Restoring the Darling-Baaka program\*](#), viewed 15 May 2025.

addressed by those recommendations are relevant to a greater range of emergencies. Therefore, the Committee has recommended that the NSW Government to, as a matter of priority, expedite the implementation of the OCSE's recommendations to cover a broader range of hazards for the Far West region, particularly electricity and telecommunication outages.

## The need for local education, expertise and engagement on emergency management

### Recommendation 8

**That the NSW Government consider issuing guidelines on the operation and membership of Regional and Local Emergency Management Committees and include specific guidance on ensuring appropriate local representation on these committees that reflects the unique characteristics of each distinct population centre in a region or local government area. In particular, for committees in communities with high representation of Aboriginal people such as Wilcannia and Menindee, these guidelines should set out requirements for ensuring the committee's permanent membership has appropriate levels of local Aboriginal representation**

- 4.45 As noted above, the lack of local knowledge incorporated into the emergency response was a key issue of the response to the electricity outages emergency raised by some inquiry participants. The OCSE's Menindee Fish Deaths Report also stressed the importance of involving local and Aboriginal knowledge in decision-making. That report recommended using community observations and traditional knowledge as important evidence to developing policy in partnership with local communities.<sup>455</sup> Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM of the NSW Police Force, Western Region Office similarly emphasised the importance of local knowledge in identifying suitable locations for emergency services and shelters during outages.<sup>456</sup>
- 4.46 Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW emphasised the importance of strong collaboration with Aboriginal organisations, as communities often rely on them to identify and support vulnerable Aboriginal residents. He also highlighted that past experiences of racism may discourage some Aboriginal people from accessing official recovery centres, making trusted local organisations critical partners in effective emergency response and recovery.<sup>457</sup>
- 4.47 Mr Hamilton noted that a 'one-size-fits-all' emergency management approach fails to reflect the unique needs of each community in the Far West. He told the Committee that a deeper understanding of the discrete Aboriginal communities is needed, and that local knowledge, particularly in regional areas where there is a high Aboriginal presence, must be better integrated into emergency

<sup>455</sup> OCSE, [Independent review into the 2023 fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka River at Menindee](#), December 2023, p 53.

<sup>456</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 11.

<sup>457</sup> Shane Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 25-26.

management to ensure that all residents receive adequate support during a disaster.<sup>458</sup>

- 4.48 Indeed, the NSW Recovery Plan recognises that it is crucial LEMCs and Local Recovery Committees develop relationships and build trust with Aboriginal communities (including discrete Aboriginal communities) to support an inclusive and culturally safe approach to emergency and recovery planning.<sup>459</sup> The Committee agrees that it is critical REMCs and LEMCs proactively maintain relationships with trusted local leaders and have appropriate local representation, particularly from ACCOs and representatives in areas with high representation of Aboriginal people.
- 4.49 Mr Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, informed the Committee that he has recently been invited to sit on the SEMC, and that LALCs and other Aboriginal organisations like Aboriginal Health have been involved in LEMCs during more recent natural disasters.<sup>460</sup> Aboriginal Affairs NSW also confirmed that LALCs are now required members of LEMCs and that they are piloting a training program with the Premier's Department to bring together LEMC and LALC members in NSW for a day on country.<sup>461</sup> While we are pleased to hear this development, Aboriginal Affairs NSW highlighted that Community Working Parties (CWPs) and other Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) should also be involved and consulted as part of emergency management and recovery.<sup>462</sup>
- 4.50 The Committee believes that ensuring appropriate local and Aboriginal representation on relevant Emergency Management Committees should be formalised. For this reason, we recommend that the NSW Government consider issuing guidelines on the operation and membership of these committees and include specific guidance on ensuring appropriate local representation. These guidelines should set out requirements for appropriate Aboriginal community representation on the membership of any relevant LEMC and REMC for an area with a high representation of Aboriginal people.

## The critical importance of reliable mobile telecommunications

### Recommendation 9

**That the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government to consider introducing regulatory requirements on carriers to ensure critical telecommunications infrastructure installations have backup power reserves that can provide a prescribed minimum backup power period. The minimum backup power period prescribed should be tailored based on the characteristics of the local government area or region and should factor in the geographical distance and context for the area.**

<sup>458</sup>Shane Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 23.

<sup>459</sup> NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), p 13.

<sup>460</sup> Shane Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 23.

<sup>461</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 7 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>462</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Aboriginal Affairs NSW, pp 1-2.



- 4.51 As discussed, residents repeatedly emphasised the distress from losing mobile telecommunications service for significant periods due to the major electricity outages affecting the Far West region.
- 4.52 As the sole mobile telecommunications provider in the area, Telstra acknowledged many sites were impacted by the loss of mains power and their battery backup systems were depleted, leading to widespread service interruption.<sup>463</sup> Telstra stated that it is accelerating its Resilient Sites program, which includes upgrades to battery systems, power redundancy, and site hardening in high-risk regional areas.<sup>464</sup>
- 4.53 The NSW Telco Authority ('Telco Authority') advised that it is the Commonwealth, not State governments, which has regulatory oversight over telecommunication carriers and commercial networks.<sup>465</sup> Ms Rania Wannous, Chief Customer Officer, Telco Authority told us that the Authority was reliant on Telstra for real-time information.<sup>466</sup> However, witnesses explained that the Telco Authority has a role supporting telecommunications carriers in emergency management arrangements and protecting telecommunications infrastructure during an emergency response.<sup>467</sup>
- 4.54 The breakdown in telecommunications during the Far West outages emergency compromised public safety and emergency coordination by posing a significant challenge to emergency coordination and response. Broken Hill City Council identified longer-term backup supply by telecommunication providers as an opportunity for improvement.<sup>468</sup> One witness recommended installing permanent generator backup at towers, particularly those that are hard to reach in the event of a storm and a surge.<sup>469</sup>
- 4.55 Indeed, the issues regarding telecommunications during the power outages were independently highlighted by the Commonwealth Government's 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review. In their report entitled 'Connecting communities, reaching every region', the Review found that 'telecommunications services fail too quickly during power outages due to insufficient backup power and network design'.<sup>470</sup> This Review strongly supported minimum backup power periods for critical telecommunications infrastructure.<sup>471</sup> Recommendation 13 of their report recommended introducing regulatory requirements for:

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<sup>463</sup> [Submission 46](#), pp 2-3.

<sup>464</sup> [Submission 46](#), pp 2-4.

<sup>465</sup> Mr Josh Weston, Manager, Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit, NSW Telco Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 15; Ms Rania Wannous, Chief Customer Officer, NSW Telco Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 15.

<sup>466</sup> Rania Wannous, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 18.

<sup>467</sup> Josh Weston, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 15; Rania Wannous, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 15.

<sup>468</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, 3 April 2025, p 2.

<sup>469</sup> Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 34-35.

<sup>470</sup> Australian Government, 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review, [Connecting communities, reaching every region](#), 2024, p 116.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, p 117.

... minimum backup power periods for new critical telecommunications infrastructure installations in regional, rural and remote Australia, with existing assets to be captured over time.<sup>472</sup>

- 4.56 The Committee agrees with the 2024 Review and strongly urge the NSW Government to work with the Commonwealth Government to consider introducing regulatory requirements on carriers to ensure their critical telecommunications infrastructure installations have backup power reserve for a prescribed minimum period. We also agree with the 2024 Review that the 'backup power infrastructure needs to be designed with the local context in mind.'<sup>473</sup> Therefore, any minimum backup power period prescribed should be tailored based on the characteristics of the local government area or region and should factor in the geographical distance and context for the area.

## Emergency preparedness of local emergency services organisations and key service delivery agencies

**The critical importance of ensuring emergency and essential services agencies can maintain communications**

### Recommendation 10

**That the NSW Telco Authority continue to support the roll out of the Critical Communications Enhancement Program and to ensure that, once completed, the Public Safety Network's full coverage includes coverage for the significant population centres in the Unincorporated Area and Central Darling Shire.**

- 4.57 One major concern for residents was losing access to emergency services as a result of the electricity and resulting telecommunications outages, as outlined in Chapter Two. NSW Health confirmed each public healthcare facility in the Far West Local Health District (LHD) already had and maintained backup generators onsite before the emergency.<sup>474</sup> However, Dr Sarah Wenham, Executive Director of Medical Services for the LHD, acknowledged that the District's health services predominantly rely on telephone and internet communications.<sup>475</sup>
- 4.58 NSW Health confirmed that there were periods when telecommunications were down in remote areas like White Cliffs and Wilcannia.<sup>476</sup> Mr Butler MP told us that, despite no reported impacts on the Menindee Health Service, the Service was impacted by the telecommunications outage until the local RFS brigade supplied them Starlink units.<sup>477</sup>
- 4.59 In response to these communication issues, we heard from the Telco Authority that they deployed 11 mobile assets, including 4 mobile radio assets known as

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, p 120.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p 48.

<sup>474</sup> Dr Sarah Wenham, Executive Director Medical Services, Far West Local Health District, NSW Health, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 21-22; [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), NSW Health, 3 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>475</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 24.

<sup>476</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Health, p 1.

<sup>477</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 9.

'P25 Cells on Wheels' (COW) to the Broken Hill, Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Tibooburra and Menindee.<sup>478</sup> Ms Rania Wannous, Chief Customer Officer, Telco Authority explained that these assets were deployed 'to either support or augment the PSN's [Public Safety Network's] coverage.'<sup>479</sup>

#### **What is the NSW Public Safety Network (PSN)?**

The PSN is a government owned, P25 digital radio network used by emergency services organisations including police, fire and ambulance, essential services agencies like health service providers and other government agencies to communicate during disasters. It is designed for extremely high reliability (a 99.95 per cent target availability) and should be able to operate across agencies to allow different organisations to communicate with each other through the same radio network.<sup>480</sup> The NSW Telco Authority's Critical Communications Enhancement Program (CCEP) is expanding the PSN to about 85 per cent of the state's land area by the second half of 2027.

- 4.60 The Telco Authority acknowledged that there are currently gaps in network coverage for the Far West region. We heard that, while Broken Hill had PSN coverage, the remote communities in surrounding areas of the Far West region like Menindee, Tibooburra, and White Cliffs did not have coverage. Ms Wannous confirmed that the PSN currently covers only about 58.8 per cent of NSW and that remote areas suffer from limited redundancy and resilience.<sup>481</sup>
- 4.61 Given the importance of ensuring emergency and essential service providers can continue delivering services and respond to emergency calls during a disaster, the Committee strongly supports the CCEP and recommend that the Telco Authority continue to support the program's rollout and, in particular, to ensure that the PSN's full coverage includes the significant population centres in the Unincorporated Area and Central Darling Shire once the CCEP is fully rolled out.

### **The emergency preparedness of local emergency and essential services agencies in the Far West**

#### **Recommendation 11**

**That the NSW Government consider reviewing all local emergency service organisations and key Aboriginal and essential services agencies in the Far West region to determine whether they have adequate backup arrangements in the event of an electricity outage and its related impacts on telecommunications, and provide support to implement appropriate backup arrangements as needed.**

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That the NSW Government provide support to the relevant Local and Regional Emergency Management Committees in the Far West region of NSW to conduct exercises for electricity outages and its related impacts on telecommunications.**

<sup>478</sup> [Answer to questions](#), NSW Telco Authority, p 3.

<sup>479</sup> Rania Wannous, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 16.

<sup>480</sup> Rania Wannous, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14

<sup>481</sup> Rania Wannous, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 18.

- 4.62 Dr Wenham, Executive Director of Medical Services, Far West LHD detailed the plans and procedures in place for the Far West LHD to ensure they can respond to unplanned emergency situations like the transmission outage. These plans and procedures are outlined in the below case study.

**Case study 7: The Far West Local Health District's emergency plans and preparation arrangements**

The Far West Local Health District (LHD) has a range of preparedness actions in place to enable a 'systemic and focused approach' to responding to unplanned emergencies.

This includes:

- including downtime procedures and business continuity plans to minimise disruptions to service delivery,
- quarterly meetings of the LHD's management committee,
- participating in regular meetings and activities of the LEMC, REMC and local rescue committee, and
- regularly maintaining onsite backup generators for all public health facilities in the Far West region.<sup>482</sup>

In response to the electricity outages emergency, the LHD quickly enacted its emergency management plans, including activating their Incident Management Team, alerting the Health Services Functional Area Coordinator (HSFAC) and redeploying staff to their HSFAC and disaster management team. During the emergency, representatives from the LHD actively participated in both the LEMCs and REMC and regularly communicated with key healthcare partners, including NSW Ambulance and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. To ensure communities were supported, the LHD also sent staff to check on residents on life-sustaining medical equipment and refrigerated medications. Mental health staff were also redeployed at Recovery Assistance Points and hospital staff often worked overtime.<sup>483</sup>

- 4.63 However, the reported impacts on essential and emergency services agencies would suggest that a number of agencies were not prepared like the Far West LHD for a major energy outage emergency. We did not receive evidence suggesting that other essential services agencies in the region had undertaken emergency preparedness training in the Far West to cope with emergencies like the prolonged power outages that they recently experienced.
- 4.64 Despite some issues with communications, the Far West LHD's integrated response highlights the value of ensuring essential and emergency services agencies are well-prepared for unplanned power and mobile service disruptions and have effective plans and procedures in place that can be implemented in response to emergencies. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the NSW Government consider reviewing whether local emergency service organisations and key Aboriginal and essential services agencies in the region have adequate backup arrangements in the event of an electricity or telecommunications outage. If any agency does not, the Government should also provide support to these agencies to implement appropriate arrangements as needed.
- 4.65 The Committee heard that the Broken Hill LEMC does conduct practice runs every 12 months. However, Mr Nankivell, General Manager of the Council noted that

<sup>482</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>483</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 23-24.

there is no joint training done with the REMC and not all LEMC members other than the LEMOs have been required to complete them.<sup>484</sup> We also heard that this training by the Broken Hill LEMC would likely cover emergencies like floods and bushfires rather than a power outage and its resulting impacts on telecommunications.<sup>485</sup> Similarly, while Central Darling Shire Council has previously conducted exercises with other government agencies for common emergencies, the Council confirmed they also had not done similar training exercises for an emergency like the power and telecommunication outages experienced in 2024.<sup>486</sup>

- 4.66 We recognise the value of testing these emergency plans and procedures, particularly for agencies and councils involved in emergency management for the region. Therefore, we call on the NSW Government to also provide support to the relevant LEMCs and REMC in the region to conduct training exercises of their emergency management arrangements in response to major electricity and telecommunications outages.

## **Emergency support and management for Life Support Customers and other vulnerable residents**

**Addressing potential barriers to identifying customers requiring generators for critical health needs**

### **Recommendation 13**

**That the NSW Government explore potential legislative amendments to health information protection laws to clarify when critical health information can be shared during an emergency without first seeking consent of the relevant patient. These amendments should make clear that this information should be shared with relevant government and non-government organisations involved in the emergency response, where that information is needed to protect the health, safety or life of individuals.**

### **Recommendation 14**

**That, in addition to recommendation 13, the NSW Privacy Commissioner publish guidance as a matter of urgency clarifying when, under existing NSW laws, healthcare and service providers can share with energy providers the health information of patients dependent on life support machines and other medical electrical devices during a significant electricity outage.**

- 4.67 Inquiry participants repeatedly drew our attention to concerns about Far West residents who relied on critical medical devices that required consistent power supply to run. 'Life Support Customers' are protected under the National Energy Customer Framework, made up by the *National Energy Retail Law (NSW) 2012*, the National Energy Retail Rules (NERR), and the National Energy Retail Regulations.<sup>487</sup> Rule 3 of the NERR defines 'life support equipment' as including

<sup>484</sup> Jay Nankivell, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 53.

<sup>485</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 10; [Answers to questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 2.

<sup>486</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 1.

<sup>487</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 5.

an oxygen concentrator, a dialysis machine, a CPAP machine, a ventilator for life support, and 'any other equipment that a registered medical practitioner certifies is required for a person residing at the customer's premises for life support'.<sup>488</sup>

- 4.68 Part 7 of the NERR outlines the obligations of energy distributors like Essential Energy to Life Support Customers, which include giving customers minimum four business days' notice of planned interruptions and information to help them prepare a plan of action for unplanned interruptions. Each distribution network service provider (DNSP) can determine how it will meet these obligations.<sup>489</sup> DNSPs are also required to keep an accurate and current register of premises where life support equipment is used, so they know where to prioritise restoration work in an unplanned outage.<sup>490</sup>
- 4.69 Essential Energy acknowledged that they do not have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or other service targets relating to the restoration of power to Life Support equipment during an unplanned outage.<sup>491</sup> This would appear to be a key gap in the existing Life Support Customer framework.
- 4.70 Essential Energy supplied small generators for customers reliant on power for vital medical needs. These customers were prioritised based on the severity of their medical conditions and life support needs.<sup>492</sup> Essential Energy worked with local healthcare providers to triage residents requiring priority assistance.<sup>493</sup>
- 4.71 Annie Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, acknowledged that their list of Life Support Customers does not include details like the customer's medical condition, their specific needs or the equipment they use.<sup>494</sup> On the other hand, we heard that NSW Health maintains records of vulnerable patients that meet the medical assessment eligibility criteria for the NSW Life Support Energy Rebate (relating to households with approved life support equipment) and the NSW Medical Energy Rebate (relating to people with medical conditions that prevent them from self-regulating body temperature).<sup>495</sup> Dr Wenham from the Far West LHD went through the specific criteria that patients are assessed against for both rebates.<sup>496</sup>
- 4.72 Once the LHD received patient consent to share the information with Essential Energy, Essential Energy could deliver generators by needs using the LHD's medical assessment criteria.<sup>497</sup> However, Mr Butler MP raised that health practitioners were worried about sharing this information because of legal

<sup>488</sup> [National Energy Retail Rules](#) (Cth) rule 3.

<sup>489</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 6; [Additional document](#), DCCEEW, *Explanatory note explaining the Life Support program*, 13 March 2025, p 1-2.

<sup>490</sup> [National Energy Retail Rules](#) (Cth); [Submission 35](#), pp 5-6.

<sup>491</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Essential Energy, 28 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>492</sup> Annie Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 73.

<sup>493</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 73.

<sup>494</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 74.

<sup>495</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 22; [Answers to questions](#), NSW Health, p 3.

<sup>496</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 23, 24.

<sup>497</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 22.



privacy protections.<sup>498</sup> Dr Wenham confirmed that healthcare providers first sought to confirm that their patients consented to information being shared.<sup>499</sup>

4.73 NSW Health advised that this information is protected under the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* ('HRIP Act'), which only allows healthcare providers to share information to an electricity service provider or other response agency about known patients who needed a generator for essential medical reasons, if:

- the patient consents,
- the disclosure is directly related to the primary purpose for collecting the patient information (i.e. patient care) which the patient would reasonably expect be disclosed,
- it is to assist during an emergency, 'where the disclosure of the information was reasonably necessary to assist in the stage of emergency and it is impracticable or unreasonable to seek consent', or
- it is to 'lessen or prevent a serious and imminent risk to the life, health or safety of an individual'.<sup>500</sup>

4.74 Stakeholders expressed frustration around the delay to coordinating support caused by seeking this patient consent.<sup>501</sup> The General Manager of Broken Hill City Council reported that delaying release of patient information further delayed attending customers needing a backup generator by about 24 hours.<sup>502</sup>

4.75 We are concerned to hear about these delays, where the sharing of that information should have fallen within the 'emergency' circumstances for disclosure under the HRIP Act. This would suggest a need to clarify to healthcare providers when they can disclose protected health information. The Committee therefore urges the NSW Government to explore potential legislative amendments to these health information protection laws to more clearly clarify these circumstances or otherwise facilitate the sharing of critical health information during an emergency, without first seeking concern of the relevant patient. Any such amendment should allow this information to be shared with relevant government and non-government organisations involved in the emergency response.

4.76 While the NSW Government considers possible legislative amendments to clarify this issue, the Committee notes that more guidance is needed in the interim to address this issue. One of the functions of the NSW Information and Privacy Commission is to oversee the HRIP Act, and the NSW Privacy Commissioner has

<sup>498</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>499</sup> Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>500</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Health, p 3.

<sup>501</sup> Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14; Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 2; [Submission 15](#), p 5; [Submission 16](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3.

<sup>502</sup> Jay Nankivell, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 52.

statutory powers to enforce the Act's privacy protections.<sup>503</sup> Therefore, we have also recommended that the NSW Privacy Commissioner publish guidance clarifying when healthcare and service providers can share with energy providers the health information of patients dependent on machines for medical needs during a significant electricity outage.

## **Maintaining current information about vulnerable residents in the case of an emergency**

### **Finding 17**

**In order to be recognised as a Life Support Customer under the National Energy Customer Framework, it falls on individual energy customers to register with their electricity retailer and provide written confirmation. This process is unlikely to capture all vulnerable individuals with serious chronic health conditions and disabilities, and this poses risks for these individuals given the more frequent planned and unplanned power outages in Far West NSW.**

### **Finding 18**

**Agencies which deliver essential services are likely to have more up-to-date internal records about local residents who are vulnerable in an emergency or crisis. In particular, health service providers may have more holistic and complete records of individuals who require urgent support in an emergency, like patients who rely on medical devices or energy for other critical health reasons.**

### **Recommendation 15**

**That the NSW Government consider supporting the Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee to establish a register identifying vulnerable local residents in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area and setting out their contact details. This register should be developed and maintained through consultation with local service providers and employees of NSW Health, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Police Force.**

- 4.77 Essential Energy reported that 577 premises were registered under the Life Support Customers Framework at the time of the outages emergency.<sup>504</sup> However, Ms Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, acknowledged that there is likely more customers relying on life support equipment and energy for medical needs than reflected in this number.<sup>505</sup>
- 4.78 This undercounting may be due to the difficulty of registering under the Life Support Customer Framework. For example, Leroy Johnson, a Far West resident who relies on home dialysis, told us that he was unaware that he was eligible for

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<sup>503</sup> Information and Privacy Commission NSW (IPC), [NSW Privacy Laws](#), viewed 28 May 2025; IPC, [HRIP Act](#), viewed 28 May 2025.

<sup>504</sup> [Submission 33](#), Essential Energy, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Essential Energy, 28 March 2025, p 21.

<sup>505</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 74.

generator assistance.<sup>506</sup> The critical importance of this kind of generator support for customers like Mr Johnson is illustrated in the below case study.

**Case study 8: The impact of losing power for Leroy Johnson, a home dialysis patient<sup>507</sup>**

Leroy Johnson requires ongoing dialysis treatment. Although his home is in Mutawintji, he could not undergo treatment at home there due to unreliable electricity so he rents a place in Broken Hill, over one-and-a-half-hour's drive away, to do his home dialysis treatment. Prior to starting his treatment at home, he travelled to South Australia to be briefed on what to do. Unlike his experience in Adelaide, he found that NSW hospitals only have two sets of times for dialysis treatment and there is limited flexibility for receiving this dialysis at hospital, which is why he does it at home.

During any power outage, Leroy's home-dialysis machine only has 20 minutes of power once the electricity goes out, in which he must properly re-infuse his blood from the machine or it is completely lost. This is made especially hard when the lights are off and he cannot see. Adding to this stress, the confusing communications about when power would be back and for how long made it difficult to plan his treatment. As one example, he received a text message that power would be back on at 11 am and it didn't come back on until after midnight. Because of this, he considered going to hospital for dialysis treatment. However, he learnt they didn't have enough space when he eventually did go, and so he had to wait over 24 hours. Despite contacting the relevant energy provider, he was given no information about whether he could get a generator for his condition. Luckily, his partner was able to get one for him. Throughout this ordeal, he had to reluctantly use his sick leave to stay home and do dialysis even though he was trying to save this leave for a transplant later in the year.

- 4.79 At the hearing, Ms Pearson outlined the process by which customers can register as Life Support Customers. She told us that the current rules require customers to provide their life support information to their retailer, which is then passed onto Essential Energy as the distributor for registration.<sup>508</sup> However, this means it falls on customers with chronic health concerns to navigate the registration process.
- 4.80 As noted above, another key limitation of the Life Support Customer Framework was the limited information provided to distributors which meant Essential Energy did not understand the specific needs of each registered Life Support Customer so could not properly triage them for supplying emergency generators. On the other hand, as discussed above, NSW Health maintains more accurate, detailed and up-to-date patient information about patients.
- 4.81 We also heard that other agencies would also have information about which vulnerable people reside in the community, including Aboriginal agencies, and welfare services and disability support providers.<sup>509</sup> Ms Pearson noted that, during the outages emergency, Essential Energy's crews worked with police to identify other vulnerable customers who may not have registered as a Life Support Customer but needed a small generator.<sup>510</sup>

<sup>506</sup> Leroy Johnson, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 40-43.

<sup>507</sup> [Submission 3](#), Mr Leroy Johnson, p 1; Leroy Johnson, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 39-44.

<sup>508</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 73.

<sup>509</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), 1 April 2025, p 1; [Submission 12](#), p 4; Shane Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 26.

<sup>510</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 73.

- 4.82 The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) clarified that their Far West District does not have a register of vulnerable residents in a particular area nor does their Local EMPLAN for disaster welfare record individuals' information, but information on possible vulnerable residents may come from their internal information database and caseworkers' local knowledge.<sup>511</sup>
- 4.83 Essential Energy have submitted a rule change to enable them to categorise Life Support Customers based on their specific medical needs instead of relying on healthcare providers to share this information during an emergency.<sup>512</sup> While we support this rule change, the Committee believes that collaboration between energy distributors like Essential Energy and agencies which directly service vulnerable community members moving forward is crucial.
- 4.84 Since some individuals who would require support do not qualify as a 'Life Support Customer', we believe that these agencies are best placed to identify who is a 'vulnerable resident' for the purposes of emergency management and response. Having this information centrally available to the Far West REMC could significantly expedite the process of identifying who needs what assistance in any future emergency response.
- 4.85 However, as outlined above, the Far West region is uniquely vulnerable given its dependence on a single line connection to the NEM. Additionally, the region is challenged by low socioeconomic status and the significant geographical isolation and distances between towns outside Broken Hill. As Greg Hill, General Manager of the Central Darling Shire Council, remarked:
- I don't have a lot of staff, so when things happen like this—now I've been in Central Darling for seven years. During that seven years, I've faced seven situations like this—not just power outages, but also two floods, COVID and two fish kills. I have very limited resources. I have to rely on government agencies to back us up. ... A lot of the government agencies don't have an understanding of our communities. They expect we'll react, that we've got resources, we can take minutes and we can keep registers.<sup>513</sup>
- 4.86 Therefore, the Committee recommends that the NSW Government consider supporting the Far West REMC to establish a register identifying vulnerable local residents in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area. This register should be developed and maintained through consultation with local service providers and employees of NSW government agencies including NSW Health, DCJ, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Police Force.

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<sup>511</sup> [Answers to questions](#), DCJ, p 1.

<sup>512</sup> Annie Pearson, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 73-74.

<sup>513</sup> Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 13.

## Chapter Five – Communications with the community during the emergency

### Communication strategies regarding the status of power supply and the emergency response

#### Overview of the communication strategies used during the emergency

- 5.1 The public communications about the status of power supply and emergency response was a key issue raised through this inquiry. To best understand community members' concerns, the communication strategies used by those involved in responding to the electricity outages emergency are outlined below.

*NSW Government agencies, including those involved in the emergency response and recovery*

- 5.2 As set out in Chapter Four, the Energy and Utilities Services Functional Area (EUSFA) within the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is the combat agency for electricity supply emergencies. In that role, EUSFA partially activated the Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan (the 'Sub Plan') on 17 October 2024. The NSW Government submitted that activating the Sub Plan included activating the 'energy emergency communication response protocol' as part of the Plan.<sup>514</sup>
- 5.3 The Committee notes that neither the Sub Plan or the Energy and Utilities Supporting Plan (the EUSPLAN) include a discrete protocol. However, both Plans address the issue of informing the public about relevant matters. Under the EUSPLAN, organisations involved in the emergency response are required to 'maintain appropriate public communications' but notes that the Public Information Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC) will be engaged as needed to assist in coordinating public information from the NSW Government.<sup>515</sup> Similarly, the Sub Plan provides that relevant information and updates to the public are to be done through the PIFAC.<sup>516</sup>

#### **What is the role of the Public Information Services Functional Area (PISFA) under the NSW emergency management framework?**

The NSW emergency management arrangements includes the Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan ('PISFA Plan'), which sets out the arrangements for the Public Information Services Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC) to 'coordinate public information services between all agencies during emergencies across the PPRR [Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery] cycle', particularly the way 'emergency management organisations provide important information to the

<sup>514</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 9.

<sup>515</sup> NSW Government, [NSW Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Supporting Plan \(EUSPLAN\)](#), October 2022, p 13.

<sup>516</sup> NSW Government, [State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan](#), June 2024, pp 15, 19; Mr Andrew Holland, APM, Assistant Commissioner, NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 12.

community in a timely, coordinated, and effective manner.<sup>517</sup> Unlike the hazard-specific supporting plans, the PISFA Plan is always active.<sup>518</sup>

The PIFAC is a member of the NSW Police Force and is responsible for coordinating the public information of participating and supporting organisations. Where a combat agency requests the PIFAC to be operational during an emergency's response phase, the PIFAC is responsible for coordinating the whole-of-government approach to the dissemination of public information in line with messaging from the combat agency or appropriate Emergency Operations Controller (EOCON).<sup>519</sup> However, the PISFA Plan explicitly clarifies that:

The Combat Agency leads the dissemination of public information, and/or warnings for that emergency. This does not preclude agencies from fulfilling their statutory obligations regarding public information/emergency information and or warnings.<sup>520</sup>

- 5.4 DCCEEW explained that, for the Far West emergency, the PIFAC was involved in the Department's internal communications planning and 'coordinated information from all functional areas and emergency services organisations and circulated the consolidated document to all stakeholders.'<sup>521</sup> Transport for NSW provided one example of how the whole-of-government communications coordination was put into practice, stating they received a request to publish 'do not travel to Broken Hill' banners on relevant websites administered by them.<sup>522</sup>
- 5.5 Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM, NSW Police Force, Western Region Office remarked that the PIFAC allows one single point of reporting rather than multiple different sources, to prevent conflicting information being communicated to the public.<sup>523</sup> Commenting on PIFAC's role during the October 2024 emergency, Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie, Strategic Capability, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) said that PIFAC provides 'good coordination right across government and gives everyone a point to access it', particularly in a less common emergency event like the outages.<sup>524</sup>
- 5.6 However, while the PIFAC has a central coordinating role, DCCEEW still has primary responsibility as combat agency under the Sub Plan for emergency information and warnings. The DCCEEW media team is required to manage all public information and media releases relating to the emergency, and to regularly coordinate with the PIFAC. This includes preparing template communications so PIFAC can immediately notify the public of the emergency and share safety advice.<sup>525</sup>
- 5.7 The NSW Government submission highlighted the strategies used by DCCEEW to communicate with communities impacted by the outages emergency. We were told that the Department launched a dedicated government webpage within the

<sup>517</sup> NSW Government, [Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan \(PISFAS Plan\)](#), June 2024, p 5.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p 6.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, pp 6, 11, 18; NSW Government, [State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan](#), p 19.

<sup>520</sup> NSW Government, [PISFAS Plan](#), p 20.

<sup>521</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 5 April 2025, p 9.

<sup>522</sup> [Answer to questions in lieu of appearance](#), Transport for NSW, 3 April 2025, p 3.

<sup>523</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 12.

<sup>524</sup> Mr Peter McKechnie, Deputy Commissioner, Strategic Capability, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 12.

<sup>525</sup> [State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan](#), p 19.



first 24 hours, which became the primary source of information for affected communities. They also fast-tracked a multi-channel advertising campaign that included spots across the region's three local commercial radio stations, paid advertisement in the Broken Hill Times (a local newspaper) and updates through a social media campaign which had both paid and organic reach.<sup>526</sup>

- 5.8 Outside of the coordinated efforts from DCCEEW and PIFAC, we heard reports of direct engagement with affected communities undertaken by government staff based locally in these communities. The NSW Department of Education noted that the public schools in the Far West region 'provided ongoing communication to its community to reach out if any support was needed' during and after the emergency.<sup>527</sup> Separately, NSW Health noted that, during times in the emergency where telecommunications access was down, local health staff in the outlying communities of White Cliffs and Wilcannia undertook door knocking and in-person check-ins to 'share messaging, including information about access to facilities.'<sup>528</sup>
- 5.9 The NSW Police Force's Western Region Office similarly sent their Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers to remote communities including Wilcannia to get information out about the availability of support through 'word-of-mouth', particularly during times without telecommunications access.<sup>529</sup> Assistant Commissioner Holland also told us that, when telecommunication lines went down, local police in these remote communities held community meetings to get information out to residents.<sup>530</sup>
- 5.10 During the transition from the response to the recovery phase of the emergency, the NSW Reconstruction Authority ('Reconstruction Authority') advised that they used the following mix of traditional and digital channels to promote the recovery support available to affected communities:
- updates on the Reconstruction Authority website with links to DCCEEW's dedicated webpage for the emergency,
  - posts on their social media pages which tagged local councils and ABC Broken Hill to broaden exposure, and Facebook stories sharing information and updates,
  - providing 'personalised assistance' for residents unable to attend the Broken Hill Recovery Assistance Point (RAP) on their social media channels,
  - collaborating regularly with the local councils to share information to the LGA's residents,

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<sup>526</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9.

<sup>527</sup> [Information sheet](#), NSW Department of Education, *Information for the inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024*, 12 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>528</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), NSW Health, 3 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>529</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 9.

<sup>530</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8.

- participating in daily media conferences, multiple radio interviews on ABC Broken Hill, and in multi-agency media releases,
- distributing flyers to local businesses and local councils for display, which promoted the opening hours of the RAPs and mobile outreach services, and
- displaying signage in Broken Hill and outreach locations advertising the available support.<sup>531</sup>

5.11 While the REMC and combined LEMCs regularly met through the emergency (as outlined in Chapter Four), the information from these meetings were not made public to the community.<sup>532</sup>

#### *Local councils*

5.12 The Central Darling Shire Council advised that they communicated action plans from the daily meetings of the combined LEMCs to the public through media releases that were also published on the Council's website, and through social media like Facebook and traditional media outlets like radio and email.<sup>533</sup> Other information such as the availability of support at the Council's office and chambers was communicated through social media.<sup>534</sup>

5.13 Broken Hill City Council reported communicating to the public about the availability of support through the Broken Hill Aged Persons Rest Centre on social media and ABC Broken Hill radio.<sup>535</sup> However, Mr Jay Nankivell, General Manager of Council told us that they relied on the REMC and other agencies to distribute information about the local support available.<sup>536</sup> The Council advised that the REMC made it clear that all communication and updates to the community about load shedding would be provided by Essential Energy and Transgrid.<sup>537</sup>

#### *Transgrid*

5.14 In their written answers to questions from the Committee, Transgrid provided us with a chronology of their public communications from 17 October to 1 November 2024 relating to the Far West emergency. This chronology sets out the timing of various communications from Transgrid that were published on Transgrid's webpage dedicated to the emergency, social media, local radio, digital and print newspapers, television and media releases.<sup>538</sup>

5.15 Transgrid maintained updates about the outages on its website and social media pages as well as through ABC Broken Hill.<sup>539</sup> They also had a representative that

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<sup>531</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, 9 April 2025, pp 4-5.

<sup>532</sup> Rob Woods, Secretary, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>533</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Central Darling Shire Council, 17 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>534</sup> Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 11.

<sup>535</sup> Jay Nankivell, General Manager, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 56.

<sup>536</sup> Jay Nankivell, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 56.

<sup>537</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, 3 April 2025, p 3.

<sup>538</sup> [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions](#), Transgrid, 31 March 2025, pp 16-45.

<sup>539</sup> Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 81.

attended Broken Hill each day to join daily press conferences with the NSW Government.<sup>540</sup> Transgrid stated that they worked closely with 'all key stakeholders' to maintain public communications, including through a 24/7 phone contact centre and direct engagement via their community engagement officers in Broken Hill, a helpdesk at a local shopping centre and through the NSW Government's Broken Hill Community Cabinet.<sup>541</sup>

- 5.16 However, Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid, clarified that it is not their practice to communicate directly with end users because their customer is Essential Energy and not household electricity consumers. Transgrid told us that privacy laws prevented Transgrid from contacting local residents (the end users) directly and that they do not have access to their contact details.<sup>542</sup> Mr Justin Oliver, Deputy Chair of the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) could not identify any specific prohibitions under the National Electricity Rules (NER) to Transgrid contacting customers of distribution networks connected to their transmission network.<sup>543</sup> Otherwise, no specific privacy protection laws were identified to the Committee that would prohibit transmission network service providers like Transgrid from directly contacting or getting contact details of end electricity customers.

#### *Essential Energy*

- 5.17 We heard that Essential Energy, as the distribution network service provider for the Far West region, would have details about the customers connected to their distribution network.<sup>544</sup> Their NSW network service provider licence requires them to communicate with their customers.<sup>545</sup>
- 5.18 Essential Energy told us that they used direct communication with customers to provide updates on the expected time for power supply restoration through phone calls and text messages, particularly to their registered life support customers. They also made daily public updates about the emergency on the Essential Energy website and social media pages and via media, through press conferences and radio interviews.<sup>546</sup> Essential Energy commented that there was no one-size-fits-all communication channel, so different channels of communications were used. They also ramped up all forms of public communications because stakeholders responded well to receiving more information, and ensured information on technical concepts were explained in plain English.<sup>547</sup>
- 5.19 On their direct communications to customers, Essential Energy informed us that SMS notifications was the main channel used to provide 'regular updates' to affected customers about 'outages (including restorations times), load shedding

<sup>540</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 13.

<sup>541</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, p 16.

<sup>542</sup> Marie Jordan, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 80; [Answers to questions](#), Transgrid, pp 7-8.

<sup>543</sup> Mr Justin Oliver, Deputy Chair, Australian Energy Regulator, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 31-32.

<sup>544</sup> Justin Oliver, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 32.

<sup>545</sup> Ms Kelly Kwan, Executive Director, Regulation and Compliance, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 32.

<sup>546</sup> [Submission 33](#), Essential Energy, pp 2-3, 14-16.

<sup>547</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 14.

events, and any other updates on the event as it progressed.<sup>548</sup> Witnesses from Essential Energy explained that, while they tried to provide estimated times of when power would be repaired or restored, there were challenges like customers not being at their property when called or customers having multiple premises. When sending messages to customers, they also had to consider the optimal time for messaging to ensure that the system is not overloaded if customers resumed using power all at once.<sup>549</sup>

#### *Telstra*

- 5.20 Telstra reported that their Regional General Manager provided ongoing updates through the media and through government stakeholders like the LEMC to relay information to the public.<sup>550</sup> However, the Committee notes that we received limited evidence regarding Telstra's public communications. As a result, we are not aware of what information was set out in their public communications, how regular these updates were, or what specific modes of communication were used to broadcast information to the public during the emergency.

### **The effectiveness of the communication strategies to inform the community**

#### **Finding 19**

**The communications strategies by government agencies, local councils, and energy service providers to deliver messaging and information to the affected communities during the electricity outages emergency were often ineffective. These strategies heavily relied on digital and mobile communication and did not adequately consider the limited efficacy of these communications due to telecommunications outages caused by prolonged mains power outages.**

#### **Recommendation 16**

**That the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water publish the report on the After Action Review of the electricity supply emergency from October 2024. This report should include a review of the communication strategies by government agencies, emergency services organisations and local government to deliver information to the community during the emergency.**

- 5.21 In this inquiry, community members across the Far West emphasised to the Committee that the communications throughout the emergency were an issue or needed improvement.<sup>551</sup> This feedback would suggest that the communication

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<sup>548</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 16.

<sup>549</sup> David Nardi, Head of Major Projects and Transmission Services, Essential Energy, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 74; Annie Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 74.

<sup>550</sup> [Submission 46](#), Telstra, p 4.

<sup>551</sup> [Answer to supplementary questions](#), Mining and Energy Union, 3 April 2025, p 1; Barbara Stephens, International Officer, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 9; Graeme McCrabb, Captain, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 15-16; John Braes, Acting General Manager, Perilya, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 22, 26; Greg Hill, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 12; Gerry Leaver, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 14, 20; Michael Williams, Chief Executive Officer and Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33; Penelope Clarke, Member,

strategies used during the emergency as outlined above may not have been effective.

- 5.22 Residents felt there was a lack of information from responsible agencies and that information was being communicated in ineffective ways, with misinformation being spread in some instances. Broken Hill City Council noted there was inconsistent and inaccurate communication from Transgrid and within the REMC, which led to confusion about when anticipated response actions would occur.<sup>552</sup>
- 5.23 Many spoke about the difficulties they faced trying to receive timely or accurate information about the emergency.<sup>553</sup> Some stakeholders viewed Transgrid's communication with local communities during the emergency as minimal.<sup>554</sup> In particular, our attention was drawn to the apparent lack of communication in the first few days of the outages.<sup>555</sup>
- 5.24 There were also concerns about the clarity and timeliness of information provided especially around planned interruptions and load shedding, and that the communication about the status of power was very erratic and not accurate.<sup>556</sup> Residents in Menindee recounted being unsure when reliable power would return,<sup>557</sup> and what was being done to fix the situation.<sup>558</sup> Some witnesses remarked that more transparency was needed.<sup>559</sup> Because of this unclear communication, stakeholders reported how this impacted on both their ability to organise their day and manage any health conditions, as highlighted in Chapters Two and Four.
- 5.25 We also heard that the communication available about the outages were mainly received via text messages from Essential Energy, with some receiving multiple

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Western Division Council, NSW Farmers, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 35; Tom Kennedy, Mayor, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 51.

<sup>552</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Broken Hill Council, p 3.

<sup>553</sup> Barbara Stephens, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 9; William Murray, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 18; Graeme McCrabb, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 15-16; [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, pp 1-2; John Braes, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 23; Bruce Byrne, Chief Operating Officer, Perilya, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 24; Rosie Siemer, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West NSW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 16, 18; Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 34-35.

<sup>554</sup> [Submission 20](#), Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD), p 1; Jason Harvey, Outback Pharmacies, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 41; Tom Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 52; Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 19.

<sup>555</sup> Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 8-9; Margot Muscat, President, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Vicki Jackson, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 16; Rebecca Young, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 34-35; Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 13; Dick Wagner, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 2.

<sup>556</sup> Rita Bruggy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6; Matt Young, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 5; Michael Boland, General Manager and Company Secretary, Broken Hill Musicians Club, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 16.

<sup>557</sup> Barbara Stephens, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Margot Muscat, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Lorraine Looney, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>558</sup> Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>559</sup> Rosie Siemer, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 19; Michael Williams, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 33.

copies of the same text message.<sup>560</sup> Essential Energy acknowledged customer complaints about receiving too many SMS notifications and noted that many of these complaints came from registered Life Support Customers. They told us that they are currently revising their internal systems to address this issue.<sup>561</sup>

- 5.26 Due to the uncertainty among the community, many relied on informal networks. Residents ended up relying on receiving information through word-of-mouth.<sup>562</sup> Stakeholders expressed appreciation for their local Member, Mr Butler MP who acted as a channel for information throughout the emergency. A number of witnesses reported being able to call his electorate office directly and rely on his social media channels for information and assistance, sometimes as the only means of getting information or help.<sup>563</sup>
- 5.27 In the absence of clear and timely updates, inquiry participants recalled that misinformation was being spread during the emergency.<sup>564</sup> The confusion and frustration felt by the community contributed to the general lack of trust and undermined public confidence in the relevant organisations and businesses.<sup>565</sup>
- 5.28 These communication challenges were intensified by failures in mobile and internet infrastructures. Many of the communication strategies from government agencies, emergency management organisations, local government and relevant private businesses assumed access to telecommunications and internet,<sup>566</sup> since many of the updates we outlined above were made through phone calls, text messages, social media and websites.
- 5.29 In particular, telecommunications connectivity was completely lost in some areas, mainly outside Broken Hill. We heard that it is not uncommon for these remote communities, which have less access to reliable mobile services and may go days without telecommunications service.<sup>567</sup> For one pastoralist, this meant that his

<sup>560</sup> Margot Muscat, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Lorraine Looney, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Barbara Stephens, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Dick Wagner, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 2; Ashley Byrne, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 3; Rita Bruggy, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>561</sup> [Submission 33](#), p 16.

<sup>562</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, Tibooburra and District Progress Association, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 8; Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29; Eliza South, Country Women's Association Broken Hill, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29; Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 15; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 5-6; William Murray, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 18; Pat Barraclough, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 18, 22; Rhonda Hynch, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22; Tom Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 51.

<sup>563</sup> Mia Degoumois, Packsaddle Roadhouse, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, 10; Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 10, 20; Rob Gregory, Volunteer and Contractor, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 17; John Braes, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 22; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 35; Jason Harvey, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 41, 44-45; Graeme McCrabb, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14; Helen Murray, Secretary, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 22; Penelope Clarke, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 35.

<sup>564</sup> Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29; Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 5-6; [Submission 19](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, p 4.

<sup>565</sup> [Submission 19](#), p 4; Graeme McCrabb, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>566</sup> Luke Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer, Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 48.

<sup>567</sup> Vicki Jackson, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 16; Dick Wagner, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 1; Matt Young, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 4; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 34-35.



family had to travel significant distances to be able to communicate with others and receive updates.<sup>568</sup>

- 5.30 Since telecommunication lines were down, Mr Boland remarked that there was 'no consistency with communications with messaging'.<sup>569</sup> Many witnesses in Broken Hill told us that the most reliable source of information during the emergency was ABC Broken Hill, the local radio station.<sup>570</sup>
- 5.31 The experiences of the region demonstrate that, when both mains power and mobile towers go down, these communities are effectively cut off. This over-reliance on digital and mobile communication channels without robust backups emerged as a key vulnerability. As Mr Butler MP described:
- Any crisis needs really solid, reliable information. That was hampered through this process by the lack of connectivity. ... As soon as that happens, the ability to get information into a community is severely curtailed. ... When you've got something like this going on, you've got no way of communicating with people, or no reliable way anyway.<sup>571</sup>
- 5.32 While we heard about a number of high-level communication strategies that were used to inform the public about the emergency, it is clear that this did not align with local experiences. Across the inquiry, a clear theme that emerged was that these strategies were critically undermined by both the telecommunications failure and the apparent absence of clear, consistent and reliable information being delivered to residents in a timely manner.
- 5.33 The Committee notes that the communication strategies used to deliver messaging and information to communities were often not effective, in light of the experiences we heard directly from residents across the Far West region. This appears to be largely due to the heavy reliance on digital and mobile communications without adequately considering the impacts of likely telecommunications outages when mains power is out for significant time periods.
- 5.34 During this inquiry, witnesses from Transgrid, Central Darling Shire Council and the NSW Police Force's Western Region Office as well as Broken Hill City Council acknowledged the issues and feedback from communities about the public communications during the emergency.<sup>572</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, DCCEEW also acknowledged

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<sup>568</sup> Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 37.

<sup>569</sup> Micheal Boland, General Manager and Company Secretary, Broken Hill Musicians Club, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 15.

<sup>570</sup> Margot Muscat, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 11; Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 15, 17, 19; Heather Picken, Treasurer, Meals on Wheels Broken Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29; Terry Smith, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 36; Jason Harvey, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 41, 45; Jill Schinella, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>571</sup> Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>572</sup> David O'Hara, General Manager of Projects, Transgrid, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 83; Greg Hill, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 12; Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, pp 8-9; [Answers to questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3.

that 'the information was not great' in the first 24 hours of the emergency,<sup>573</sup> and that the Department's communications efforts in this emergency were 'more than we had ever trained for or exercised in the past.'<sup>574</sup>

- 5.35 Witnesses from DCCEEW noted during the public hearing on 17 March that a formal After Action Review (AAR) by independent facilitators was expected to be completed around mid-April, and would call out communications as one major lesson that has since been implemented in response to subsequent emergencies.<sup>575</sup> DCCEEW also informed us that the Department and independent reviewers are consulting with the Far West LEMCs as part of the AAR.<sup>576</sup>
- 5.36 We were pleased to hear that the AAR was anticipated to touch on the issue of communications during the emergency. However, any report on the AAR currently does not appear to be publicly available. The Committee has therefore recommended that DCCEEW publish the report on the AAR for the electricity supply emergency from October 2024, which should include a review of the communication strategies used by government agencies, emergency services organisations and local government to inform the community during the emergency.

## **The need for tailored communication strategies for remote, rural and regional communities like the Far West**

### **Recommendation 17**

**That the NSW State Emergency Management Committee consider amending the Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan or developing a Regional Public Information Sub Plan which provides guidance for developing local communication protocols to inform and update remote, rural and regional communities during an emergency while ensuring that any protocol is tailored for their local community, involves local expertise, and factors in strategies for communicating during a telecommunications outage.**

### **Recommendation 18**

**That the NSW Government support the Local and Regional Emergency Management Committees for the Far West region to develop a protocol for communicating emergency response and management information with affected communities, which takes into account the distinct context and characteristics of each town in the region. This protocol should be developed in consultation with local representatives from key government agencies and emergency services organisations, local government, key community representative bodies and locally-based non-government organisations, local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and local media outlets.**

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<sup>573</sup> Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, DCCEEW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 37.

<sup>574</sup> Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 42.

<sup>575</sup> Mr Jamie Caldwell, Director, Energy Operations, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, DCCEEW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 42; Liam Ryan, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 42.

<sup>576</sup> [Answers to questions](#), DCCEEW, p 11.

- 5.37 Many of the communication issues that stakeholders have highlighted to the Committee appear to reflect the importance of understanding how the unique regional context of the Far West can impact the effectiveness of communications to the public about emergency management and response. One newer resident of the Tibooburra area remarked that:

Everywhere has power outages due to unforeseen circumstances, but you don't have the heat, for one thing, and you don't have **the inaccessibility to communications and to services**, and even just food. Even the way a grid—parts of a town will go out, but not the whole town, usually. ... The fact that it's just par for the course kind of did blow me away a little bit. [Emphasis added.]<sup>577</sup>

- 5.38 In their submission, the Western Region Office of the NSW Police Force acknowledged the difficulties experienced reaching 'small, isolated communities' in the region during the telecommunications and power outages. They called for the 'development of a strategy to combat this',<sup>578</sup> which should be developed by the LEMCs with support from the Regional Emergency Management Officer (REMO) because 'local people are the ones who know their communities best.'<sup>579</sup>

- 5.39 The Western Region Office cautioned against involving 'external consultants or people from outside of community' to develop the strategy, because community members may feel 'disenfranchised' since they do not 'own' this strategy. Likewise, they did not believe every Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) from the State to local levels needed to reflect this strategy, because 'each LEMC is different and some LEMC's do not deal with small or isolated communities' so should be 'managed at a local level to address local nuances.'<sup>580</sup>

- 5.40 The Committee strongly agrees with the NSW Police Force, Western Region Office's views that local communities across the Far West region would benefit from a protocol for the region's REMC and LEMCs communicating emergency management and response information to them. We recommend that the NSW Government support the Far West's REMC and LEMCs, including the Unincorporated Area LEMC, to develop such a protocol, which takes into account the distinct context and characteristics of each town in the region.

- 5.41 As recommended by the Western Region Office, we call on the Government to ensure that this protocol is developed in consultation with local representatives from the communities represented. This includes local representatives from key government agencies and emergency services organisations, local government, key community representative bodies and locally-based non-government organisations, local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and local media outlets.

- 5.42 However, we note that, while the Far West region has very unique and distinct characteristics, the issues relating to communicating important information about emergency management and response is shared by regional, rural and particularly remote communities across NSW. Indeed, past research into

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<sup>577</sup> Emma McLean, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2024, p 16.

<sup>578</sup> [Submission 40](#), NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, p 1.

<sup>579</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, 1 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>580</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, pp 1-2.

communicating flood and bushfire preparedness for rural communities highlighted that 'communities are inherently different and need targeted emergency communications, tailored to the disaster type and community composition.'<sup>581</sup> It also emphasised the importance of 'two-way' communications, information coming from a trusted source, and the significant influence of face-to-face communication and using informal, personal networks.<sup>582</sup>

- 5.43 For this reason, we also recommend that the NSW State Emergency Management Committee consider amending the PISFA Supporting Plan or developing a Regional Public Information Sub Plan that would provide guidance for developing local communication protocols for informing the remote, rural and regional communities during an emergency. This guidance should set out how LEMCs can be supported to develop strategies that are tailored for their communities, involves local expertise, and factors in strategies for communicating during a telecommunications outage.
- 5.44 While any communication protocol will depend on the relevant local context and characteristics, the Committee has outlined below some areas for improvement identified by stakeholders regarding the public communications during the Far West electricity outages emergency. We encourage any Emergency Management Committee to consider these issues when developing any tailored communication protocol.

#### **An identified, single source for reliable information**

- 5.45 We heard calls for a single lead agency to be clearly identified to the public early in the crisis, to reduce confusion over whether an electricity network service provider, a local council, or a NSW Government agency was coordinating the response.<sup>583</sup> Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC ('Barkandji Corporation') argued that frequent and localised updates which provide 'clear information tailored to the specific needs of each affected area' could improve the effectiveness of reaching people during an electricity outages emergency.<sup>584</sup>
- 5.46 Broken Hill City Council also argued that a single point to share updates through and relay community feedback back to the REMC as a two-way communication channel is needed to better understand the needs of the community.<sup>585</sup>
- 5.47 Similarly, Barkandji Corporation also highlighted community hubs with generator power where people can access information, as another way communications

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<sup>581</sup> Dr H Boon, '[Investigation rural community communication for flood and bushfire preparedness](#)', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol 29, issue 4, October 2014, p 17.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid p 24.

<sup>583</sup> [Submission 12](#), National Disability Services, pp 2, 8; [Answer to supplementary question](#), LiveBetter, 4 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>584</sup> [Answer to supplementary question](#), Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, 4 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>585</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 3.

could have been more effective during the Far West emergency from October 2024.<sup>586</sup> The role of community hubs is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

### Preparing and using diverse methods of communication

- 5.48 When power and telecommunications are both out, reaching the community requires more robust methods and it is essential that relevant agencies and corporations can deliver information through multiple channels. From the experience of the Far West electricity outages emergency, relying solely on mobile networks proved unsafe. This could include delivering information to the public through a mix of SMS text messages, local radio, physical displays on community noticeboards and local social media pages and groups.<sup>587</sup>
- 5.49 Specifically, we heard suggestions that a noticeboard where people can go and get updates from one single point could be beneficial during an emergency.<sup>588</sup> Mr Butler MP supported investing in alternative technologies, for example, he recalled a suggestion to use a 'solar-powered screen' connected to Starlink to display messages.<sup>589</sup> Similarly, radio-based alert systems or sirens could notify people of urgent information even if phones are not working due to mobile service connection issues or a loss of power.
- 5.50 We heard about 'face-to-face' communication methods. Several stakeholders pointed to the need for and importance of 'door-knock' approaches to share information during the emergency.<sup>590</sup> Some community organisations such as the Barkandji Corporation personally drove to remote communities to check on employees and relay information.<sup>591</sup> We also heard about local health staff doing community check-ins to identify vulnerable members of the community and share messaging, including information about access to facilities.<sup>592</sup> Local Police Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers also travelled to different remote communities to inform people.<sup>593</sup>

### Making use of informal community networks

- 5.51 As outlined above, many residents in the Far West relied on informal networks to receive information during the outages. Engaging local volunteers and community leaders in advance could leverage their invaluable local knowledge of how to best support residents, particularly the most vulnerable or remote, from an existing place of trust. As Taunoa Bugmy, a local Wilyakali woman pointed out, communication 'really didn't hit many ears of our people, unless it was our

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<sup>586</sup> [Answer to question](#), Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, p 1.

<sup>587</sup> [Answer to question](#), Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, p 1.

<sup>588</sup> Rob Woods, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>589</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 7.

<sup>590</sup> Barbara Stephens, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 9; Rena Callow, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 12; Greg Hill, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 13; Ashley Byrne, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 28; Taunoa Bugmy, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 32.

<sup>591</sup> Luke Driscoll, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 49-50.

<sup>592</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Health, p 1.

<sup>593</sup> Andrew Holland, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 9.

community people actually out doorknocking and saying, "You can access this. This is how you do it."<sup>594</sup>

- 5.52 The Committee agrees that future emergency responses must also prioritise local knowledge and inclusive engagement in the delivery of relevant information to the public.

**Tailoring communications to ensure they are accessible for people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people and Aboriginal communities**

- 5.53 Disability advocates pointed out that, during the Far West emergency, information was delivered 'in written format mostly via text or website updates', which are inappropriate for communicating with people who have vision or hearing difficulties.<sup>595</sup> The National Disability Services recommended developing accessible and inclusive communication channels which could include issuing 'easy read guides' that can be understood by individuals with intellectual disabilities.<sup>596</sup>
- 5.54 There was also no mention of whether the communication plans and strategies used in the emergency from October 2024 included languages other than English, sign language or culturally-appropriate language. It is important that emergency management and response communications are accessible for those local community members who are Aboriginal, have a disability, or are culturally and linguistically diverse.

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<sup>594</sup> Taunoa Bugmy, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 32.

<sup>595</sup> [Submission 12](#), pp 4, 9.

<sup>596</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 9.



## Chapter Six – Support for affected communities

### The importance of strong community networks in the Far West region

#### Finding 20

**Strong community networks were essential during the outages emergency, as affected residents were able to rely on their communities for support. Residents often relied on other community members and organisations to obtain information, and these community members and organisations were often the only people checking in on their wellbeing.**

- 6.1 Through speaking with communities across Far West NSW, it is clear that residents, particularly those in smaller towns outside of Broken Hill, rallied together to provide support to their fellow community members during the emergency.<sup>597</sup> The support provided by the Menindee Headquarters Brigade of the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is one example, with several residents of Menindee commending the actions taken by the Brigade during the emergency.<sup>598</sup> As Michelle Kelly, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) said, 'That's what we do. When there is a crisis, we come together as a community, and we try to work out what we can do ourselves.'<sup>599</sup>
- 6.2 The NSW Department of Education highlighted the significant relief efforts that local schools in the Far West region provided to their communities, 'going above and beyond to support students and communities'.<sup>600</sup> In Menindee, we were told that the local school offered up resources for the community.<sup>601</sup> Similarly, Michael Kennedy, Chairperson of the Wilcannia LALC told us that the only support or assistance which he received during the 'three weeks of the power outage' was the delivery of fruit and vegetables from the school.<sup>602</sup>
- 6.3 Local stakeholders from these outlying towns communicated to the Committee that this is just natural for these communities, who feel like they have to depend on each other because they can't afford to wait for external support.<sup>603</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth from the Tibooburra and District Progress Association noted that the community did not receive any locally coordinated information from a single

<sup>597</sup> [Submission 10](#), Mrs Helen Murray, p 1; Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 6.

<sup>598</sup> Michelle Kelly, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 3-4, 6; Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 12; Graeme McCrabb, Captain, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>599</sup> Michelle Kelly, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>600</sup> [Information sheet](#), NSW Department of Education, *Information for the inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024*, 12 March 2025, pp 1-2.

<sup>601</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 4-5.

<sup>602</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 6.

<sup>603</sup> Luke Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer, Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 49.

source, but remarked that the community 'just look after each other.'<sup>604</sup> As she described, 'there is somebody in town that knows somebody that has some sort of medical condition that needs that sort of help so, yes, we look after our own.'<sup>605</sup>

- 6.4 Indeed, a recurring theme we heard from speaking directly with the affected communities in the Far West region was that people had to wear many different 'hats' in these small, more isolated towns outside Broken Hill.<sup>606</sup> Peter Price, Treasurer of the Silverton Village Committee, observed that 'typically, probably [in] smaller communities, the same ones do all the hack work and want to keep it going. We see value in it. We love our little village and we're really keen'.<sup>607</sup>
- 6.5 Tracey Hotchin, owner of the Tibooburra Hotel and representative from the Tibooburra Village Committee, recounted the support she offered during the emergency, including refrigerating medication for residents, which highlights the 'bush community spirit' strongly demonstrated by communities across the Far West region.<sup>608</sup> This support was described by Tracey as 'about community' and 'helping one another'. She emphasised that this was 'just our nature. It's how we've been raised. It's how we've been brought up'.<sup>609</sup>
- 6.6 Bill Elliott, a resident of Wilcannia, remarked that, because of the frequency of power disruptions to their community, 'we're semi-organised for things like this to happen, in a way' when recounting how several local businesses and households already had backup generators before the emergency.<sup>610</sup>
- 6.7 Similarly, members of the Silverton Village Committee remarked that Silverton has experienced regular power interruptions from scheduled maintenance for years leading up to the electricity outages emergency.<sup>611</sup> Peter Price, Treasurer, told us that he has a big generator for his hotel business because of this history. As a result, he was able to provide support by continuing to supply food not just to the local Silverton community but also 'we had people come out from Broken Hill that couldn't get things'.<sup>612</sup>
- 6.8 Not only did community members offer support to their communities across the Far West region, these community networks were also key information channels for residents.<sup>613</sup> Michael Kennedy, Wilcannia LALC, described how the community

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<sup>604</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, Tibooburra and District Progress Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 5.

<sup>605</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 10.

<sup>606</sup> For example, Terry Smith told us he is both the President of the Pastoralists' Association of West Darling and the captain of his local Rural Fire Service brigade. He further noted that this RFS station is his property because they size of the brigade area is too large to have a station base. See Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 33-34.

<sup>607</sup> Peter Price, Treasurer, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 26.

<sup>608</sup> Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 5, 10.

<sup>609</sup> Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 17.

<sup>610</sup> Bill Elliott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 21.

<sup>611</sup> Helen Murray, Secretary, and Peter Price, Treasurer, Silverton Village Committee, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>612</sup> Peter Price, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>613</sup> Dr Sarah Wenham, Executive Director Medical Services, Far West Local Health District, NSW Health, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 24.

kept each other informed during the early stages of the electricity outages emergency through 'normal conversation between family and friends'.<sup>614</sup> He noted that this was characteristic of 'such small communities' because 'a lot of people know people around this whole area'.<sup>615</sup> We also heard that Business Far West was able to relay information that they received from Service NSW to business owners in Broken Hill during the emergency.<sup>616</sup>

- 6.9 Witnesses from the NSW Police Force, Western Region Office and the Far West Local Health District commended the resilience displayed by communities in the Far West region, particularly the members of smaller communities who banded together to support one another.<sup>617</sup> The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister for Energy, also acknowledged the 'profound resilience' displayed by these communities in response to the emergency as well as the 'many community members who stepped up to help'.<sup>618</sup> The Committee shares these views, and recognises that the strong community networks seen were essential for both community support and as a means of obtaining information during the emergency.

## Support provided by businesses and non-government and community organisations

- 6.10 The Committee heard about the important role of businesses and non-government organisations (NGOs) during the electricity supply emergencies. Many stakeholders referred us to the various forms of emergency support that communities received from these businesses and organisations.
- 6.11 Local NDIS providers reported to National Disability Services about the emergency assistance provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), enabling the community to access water and charging facilities, and of food vouchers provided by Lifeline.<sup>619</sup> A witness from Broken Hill told us that the first 'official emergency centre that was open straightaway' was the RFDS's centre in Broken Hill.<sup>620</sup>
- 6.12 Residents in Wilcannia recalled that people could go to the local police station or post office for wi-fi, as well as the local hospital and golf club for support. They told us that the community heard about this available support through word-of-mouth, notices in local shops and phone communication by Central Darling Shire Council.<sup>621</sup>

<sup>614</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 2.

<sup>615</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 5.

<sup>616</sup> [Answer to supplementary question](#), Business Far West, 3 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>617</sup> Andrew Holland APM, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 8; Sarah Wenham, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 24.

<sup>618</sup> [Submission 35](#), NSW Government, p 1.

<sup>619</sup> [Submission 12](#), National Disability Services, p 7; Helen Miller, General Manager of In Home Supports and Clinical Lead, LiveBetter, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 39; [Answer to supplementary question](#), Broken Hill LiveBetter, 4 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>620</sup> Michael Boland, General Manager and Company Secretary, Broken Hill Musicians Club, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 14.

<sup>621</sup> Bill Elliott, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), pp 21-22; Pat Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22; Rhonda Hynch, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 22.

- 6.13 The NSW Government highlighted outreach services provided through Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation and the Wilcannia Council Agency to assist affected Aboriginal communities.<sup>622</sup> Central Darling Shire Council told us that Maari Ma did welfare checks and helped distribute food hampers.<sup>623</sup> Luke Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer of Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC also recounted the support that their rangers offered to communities in Menindee and Wilcannia during the electricity outages emergency, despite their role primarily being land management and cultural monitoring.<sup>624</sup>
- 6.14 The Broken Hills Musician Club also highlighted the significant support arranged by ClubsNSW. This included providing water pallets to Broken Hill and especially Wilcannia, delivery of fifteen drums for diesel storage to Broken Hill, and organising food trucks for standby. We were informed about the \$100,000 raised and donated to the Musicians Club by the Mounties Group Sydney, to be donated to organisations in need in the Far West region. The Musicians Club outlined how some of this has been used for low-income earners to replace damaged whitegoods and access mental health support, and how another \$44,000 of that donation has been allocated to projects which are still underway.<sup>625</sup>
- 6.15 Many local businesses also extended support to their communities despite the significant impacts on their finances and operations. Heather Picken, Treasurer, Meals on Wheels Broken Hill, recounted how one local electrician provided the charity with a generator on the first day of the emergency and ran it without charge to ensure they would have reliable power.<sup>626</sup>
- 6.16 The Perilya mine also played an important role in supporting grid stability during the outages. John Braes, Acting General Manager of Perilya said that Perilya was asked by Essential Energy to start and stop their equipment to help manage the load on the grid.<sup>627</sup> He explained that the loads were managed by Perilya to assist Transgrid and Essential Energy to control the impact of rooftop solar, which 'kept the lights on in Broken Hill'.<sup>628</sup> NSW Police said this cooperation from the mines was essential to ensure the effective distribution of energy during the outages.<sup>629</sup>
- 6.17 We also heard about the significant support provided by Tilt Renewables, the owners and operators of the 200 megawatt Wind Farm in Silverton, to the local community.<sup>630</sup> Tilt Renewables noted that their response was focused on supporting the community, particularly the Silverton community neighbouring their wind farm, as well as vulnerable community members. This support included donating 48 generators to residents of Silverton and the Broken Hill

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<sup>622</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8.

<sup>623</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Central Darling Shire Council, 17 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>624</sup> Luke Driscoll, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 46, 48-49.

<sup>625</sup> [Submission 37](#), Broken Hill Musicians Club, p 9; Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 17.

<sup>626</sup> Heather Picken, Meals on Wheels Broken Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>627</sup> John Braes, Acting General Manager Perilya, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>628</sup> John Braes, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>629</sup> [Submission 40](#), NSW Police Force Western Region Officer, p 1.

<sup>630</sup> Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 5.

LALC housing, donations to the local Meals on Wheels branch and funding vouchers to be distributed by Lifeline.<sup>631</sup>

- 6.18 Members of the Silverton Village Committee spoke of their great appreciation for this support from Tilt Renewables. Helen Murray, Secretary emphasised that on the second day of the emergency, 'I received one phone call to see if we needed assistance, and that was from the lady at Tilt Renewables.'<sup>632</sup> Peter Price, Treasurer, highlighted that 'it was identified that we had an issue and they came on board, which was nice'. Because of this support and collaboration, he noted that they were able to ensure every Silverton resident, particularly the elderly, now have access to a small generator connected to their homes.<sup>633</sup>

## The role of community hubs during emergencies

### Recommendation 19

**That the NSW Government review any applicable Emergency Management Plans and Recovery Plans for the Broken Hill and Far West region of NSW and consider including explicit recognition of the role of local community hubs, particularly local clubs and businesses, in emergency response and recovery.**

- 6.19 Inquiry participants drew our attention to the critical role of community hubs in Far West NSW. We heard that the Broken Hill Musicians Club and Wilcannia Golf Club provided important community support during the emergency.<sup>634</sup> ClubsNSW highlighted that clubs regularly act as evacuation centres and refuges for communities during natural disasters and emergencies, and often play a role in emergency relief support.<sup>635</sup> Michael Boland, General Manager of the Broken Hill Musicians Club, noted that 'club CEOs and club GMs are embedded in their communities, and we know what's happening in our community, and we can react in time.'<sup>636</sup>
- 6.20 Both Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon and ClubsNSW highlighted that these local clubs became key community hubs because of their independent backup power.<sup>637</sup> The Broken Hill Musicians Club's submission echoed this, stating that the Club was able to operate as a community hub because of its 'two large generators, the large size of the venue and the support we received from the Club industry.'<sup>638</sup> As a result, local residents were able to rely on these locations for emergency relief, including air conditioning and temperature

<sup>631</sup> [Submission 25](#), Tilt Renewables, pp 3-4; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Tilt Renewables, 4 April 2025, pp 1-2.

<sup>632</sup> Helen Murray, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, pp 22-23.

<sup>633</sup> Peter Price, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 22.

<sup>634</sup> [Submission 26](#), ClubsNSW, p 1; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 8; Bill Elliott, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 21.

<sup>635</sup> Simon Sawday, Director of Government Affairs, ClubsNSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>636</sup> Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>637</sup> [Submission 26](#), p 1; Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 7.

<sup>638</sup> [Submission 37](#), p 2.

control, charging of mobile and other electronic devices including medical equipment, access to the internet and storing medicines in fridges.<sup>639</sup>

- 6.21 Similarly, many community members from the smaller towns outside of Broken Hill highlighted the important role that their local hubs played during the emergency. Relevantly, the local residents from the Corner Country who spoke to the Committee also highlighted key businesses like the local pubs and shops as the hubs of their communities.<sup>640</sup> The NSW Department of Education acknowledged that public schools often play a central role in their local community and are well-prepared to respond to emergencies as seen in the Far West. Again, this support provided by schools in the region were publicly commended by the Department.<sup>641</sup> We heard that the local school in Menindee distributed information and was a central location for receiving emergency relief.<sup>642</sup>
- 6.22 However, ClubsNSW expressed frustration that local clubs are not formally recognised as emergency response centres and do not receive assistance for their emergency support roles. While ClubsNSW was able to coordinate and deliver diesel generators and fuel for the Broken Hill Musicians Club and Wilcannia Golf Club, these clubs still incurred significant costs for providing emergency relief.<sup>643</sup>
- 6.23 Witnesses from ClubsNSW and the Broken Hill Musicians Club agreed that most local clubs are not on any emergency management committees, and are unlikely to be aware of any emergency management plans or their role in an emergency.<sup>644</sup> Both ClubsNSW and the Broken Hill Musicians Club called for formal recognition of the role of local clubs as community hubs during emergencies and disasters. This would include ensuring that local clubs and their peak body receive timely communications from local authorities and emergency management agencies, and that clubs are able to receive support and assistance to operate as community crisis hubs and be represented on relevant emergency management committees.<sup>645</sup>
- 6.24 The Committee appreciates the important role played by local community hubs like clubs and businesses in emergency response and recovery, as seen in the Far West electricity outages emergency. Therefore, we recommend that the NSW Government review any applicable Emergency Management Plans and Recovery Plans for the Far West region and consider including explicit recognition of the role of local community hubs.

<sup>639</sup> [Submission 26](#), p 1; Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 13.

<sup>640</sup> Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 8, 9; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, pp 8, 9.

<sup>641</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Department of Education, 8 April 2025, p 3.

<sup>642</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>643</sup> [Submission 26](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 37](#), p 10.

<sup>644</sup> Simon Sawday, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 15; Michael Boland, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 15.

<sup>645</sup> [Submission 26](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 37](#), p 12; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ClubsNSW, 28 March 2025, pp 2-3.



## Support provided by government agencies for the communities' long-term recovery from the outages

### The recovery led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority

- 6.25 The NSW Government took a number of actions to support the community's recovery from the emergency, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority (the 'Reconstruction Authority'). Witnesses from Service NSW explained that the 'recovery' from an emergency or disaster is a point in time when the combat agency hands over to the Reconstruction Authority. Once this is done, other agencies and support services become involved to support the recovery led by the Reconstruction Authority.<sup>646</sup>
- 6.26 The Government submitted that there was a formal transition to the recovery phase on 4 November 2024, which handed over lead responsibility for this recovery to the CEO of the Reconstruction Authority as State Emergency Recovery Controller.<sup>647</sup> From 5 November, the Reconstruction Authority convened a Regional Recovery Committee for the Far West which included representatives from local councils, emergency management functional areas and other government agencies.<sup>648</sup>
- 6.27 Before this transition, the Reconstruction Authority noted that the daily, multi-agency standup coordination meetings convened by the State Emergency Operations Controller helped identify a range of community impacts and needs, including those discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>649</sup>
- 6.28 From 29 October to 22 November 2024, the Reconstruction Authority established a Recovery Assistance Point (RAP) in Broken Hill which provided 4,700 people a 'one-stop shop' for support and services, and allowed affected individuals to be referred to other services they might not realise they need.<sup>650</sup> The Reconstruction Authority was also responsible for contacting several relevant agencies and service providers to attend the recovery centres, including the RFDS, financial counsellors, relief charities, the Insurance Council of Australia,<sup>651</sup> and Service NSW which helped people access available financial grants discussed later below.<sup>652</sup>
- 6.29 Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW talked about attending the RAP in Broken Hill.<sup>653</sup> Regarding the

<sup>646</sup> Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 19; Mr Jim Henry, Executive Director, Disaster Preparation and Recovery, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 19.

<sup>647</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8; [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#) s 20A.

<sup>648</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9; [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, 9 April 2025, p 2.

<sup>649</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, pp 1-2.

<sup>650</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Legal Aid NSW, 27 March 2025, pp 2-3; Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 30; [Answers to questions on notice and supplementary question](#), Service NSW, 1 April 2025, p 3.

<sup>651</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Legal Aid NSW, pp 1-2; Elizabeth Lehmann, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 30; [Answers to questions](#), Service NSW, p 3; [Answers to questions](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, pp 1-3.

<sup>652</sup> [Answers to questions](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, pp 2-3; [Submission 35](#), p 8; Greg Wells, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 16.

<sup>653</sup> Elizabeth Lehmann, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 27-28, 30.

people who received these legal services, she observed that 'all clients were vulnerable by virtue of being in a remote location, which acts as a barrier to accessing services.'<sup>654</sup>

- 6.30 Mobile outreach was also done in impacted areas outside Broken Hill, including Menindee, Tibooburra, White Cliffs and Wilcannia.<sup>655</sup> Greg Hill, General Manager of Central Darling Shire Council, confirmed that recovery centres were established in the Menindee Civic Town Hall within 24 hours of the emergency, and then in the White Cliffs Sport Club two days later.<sup>656</sup>
- 6.31 The Reconstruction Authority reported supporting more than 870 people through this outreach,<sup>657</sup> which included helping businesses to apply for financial support and insurance claims and assisting referrals for mental health support.<sup>658</sup> We also heard that Mobile Service Centres were sent by Service NSW to Menindee, Tibooburra, Packsaddle, Wilcannia, White Cliffs and Ivanhoe.<sup>659</sup>
- 6.32 The NSW Government reported that, over the month from 29 October:
- ... an estimated 4,935 people received 2,419 grocery vouchers (value of \$251,900) and 1,920 fuel vouchers (value of \$96,000) distributed via the Recovery Outreach Service and a Recovery Assistance Point in Broken Hill.<sup>660</sup>
- 6.33 The Reconstruction Authority collaborated with Foodbank NSW/ACT to deliver 2,000 hampers of non-perishable food and five pallets of water to 'community members in need'. The Government noted that this was done in partnership with volunteers from the NSW State Emergency Service (SES) and NGOs like the Salvation Army, Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, and Mission Australia.<sup>661</sup> We heard from the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) that a number of NGOs and government agencies had a meeting chaired by the State Welfare Services Functional Area Coordinator, to address the food security issues and delivery of the food hampers.<sup>662</sup>
- 6.34 Local community members expressed gratitude for the RAP established in Broken Hill. One resident described the RAP as 'a great idea even though for a while it was inundated.'<sup>663</sup> Ms Lehmann, Legal Aid NSW also told us that the clients she

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<sup>654</sup> Elizabeth Lehmann, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 27.

<sup>655</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8; Greg Wells, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14; [Answers to questions](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, p 3.

<sup>656</sup> Greg Hill, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 12.

<sup>657</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8; Greg Wells, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14; [Answers to questions](#), NSW Reconstruction Authority, p 3.

<sup>658</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8.

<sup>659</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 8.

<sup>660</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9.

<sup>661</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9.

<sup>662</sup> [Answers to questions in lieu of appearance](#), NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), 1 April 2025, p 1.

<sup>663</sup> [Submission 31](#), p 1.

assisted 'benefited significantly from being able to get legal advice and support in one coordinated location' at the RAP.<sup>664</sup>

- 6.35 However, a Broken Hill resident described the confusing communication about the support available through the RAP.<sup>665</sup> Eliza South, Country Women's Association Broken Hill, noted that the availability of relief support was not well communicated 'so it became a word-of-mouth thing' but this resulted in misinformation.<sup>666</sup> In addition to these communication failures, she noted that there was a failure to engage with local organisations to communicate the visit by the Premier and Minister and the nature of any response actions, as well as a 'huge lack of knowledge sharing'.<sup>667</sup>
- 6.36 Some stakeholders were critical that the execution of the food hampers program reflected a lack of understanding of the local context in the region's communities. Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW highlighted that, since the food hamper program delivered only one hamper per household, it 'doesn't always work for Aboriginal communities' like those in Far West NSW where multiple families may be living in a single residence.<sup>668</sup> Rhonda Hynch, Chair of the Wilcannia Working Party, also described the food hampers as well-meaning, but highlighted that 'they didn't replace what came out of the fridge. That was the fresh meat and veggies'.<sup>669</sup>
- 6.37 Both the Central Darling Shire Council and the Menindee RFS Brigade raised concerns about the logistical and administrative burden of delivering food hampers to affected residents in the Far West region. The Brigade noted that the food hampers were left to them to deliver rather than being picked up at a single point of contact. This was a problematic process because of the inaccuracy of available addresses.<sup>670</sup> Central Darling Shire Council highlighted that distributing these food hampers was labour-intensive and fell on both volunteers, council and government agency staff.<sup>671</sup> Broken Hill City Council shared this same feedback to the Reconstruction Authority.<sup>672</sup>
- 6.38 The Brigade and the Councils both argued that, rather than delivering hampers of food from outside the region to help replace spoilt food, an approach that allowed residents to restock food supplies from local supermarkets and businesses would have been a better approach.<sup>673</sup>
- 6.39 Commenting on the Mobile Service Centres in Tibooburra, Tracey Hotchin of the Tibooburra Village Committee told us that 'they came here three times to do that.' She considered that, rather than travelling to their remote community, this

<sup>664</sup> Elizabeth Lehmann, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 26.

<sup>665</sup> Eliza South, Country Women's Association, Broken Hill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>666</sup> Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 29.

<sup>667</sup> Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 29-30.

<sup>668</sup> Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 25.

<sup>669</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>670</sup> [Submission 18](#), Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, p 2.

<sup>671</sup> [Submission 4](#), Central Darling Shire Council, p 3.

<sup>672</sup> [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, 3 April 2025, p 2.

<sup>673</sup> [Submission 18](#), p 2; [Submission 4](#), p 3; [Answers to questions](#), Broken Hill City Council, p 2.

outreach could have been done by telephone or through the electricity company, without requiring Service NSW staff physically come to verify which residents were without power. She remarked that the costs of this remote outreach could have been more efficiently put to long-term solutions, like establishing a microgrid in Tibooburra.<sup>674</sup>

- 6.40 The Committee acknowledges the issues that have been raised by inquiry participants with the design and delivery of the emergency recovery efforts. However, we were unfortunately not able to examine these issues in detail given the limited evidence we received regarding the formal recovery efforts and the Reconstruction Authority's unfortunate unavailability to appear at a public hearing. We hope that the Reconstruction Authority has identified these issues as learnings from their operations regarding the Far West electricity supply emergency and will implement improvements to ensure future recovery efforts are better targeted for the unique characteristics of the region.

#### Grant funding from the NSW Government delivered by Service NSW

##### Recommendation 20

**That the NSW Government consider utilising any unclaimed grant funding administered by Service NSW for residents of Far West NSW to provide additional financial support for vulnerable communities affected by the 2024 electricity outages emergency to aid their recovery and improve resilience.**

- 6.41 The NSW Government provided a financial support package totalling \$4 million, which included a \$1.5 million contribution from Transgrid. Service NSW is delivering this support package as grants comprising one-off payments to adults of \$200, and business owners of \$400. Eligible people and businesses were able to apply for these grants until 31 March 2025.<sup>675</sup>
- 6.42 Local residents expressed appreciation for the offer of financial support from the NSW Government.<sup>676</sup> However, we heard consistent feedback across inquiry participants that the \$200 and \$400 grants being delivered by Service NSW were far smaller than the costs of the electricity outages emergency to people and businesses.<sup>677</sup> One witness told us that the \$200 grant would be lucky to cover two nights' worth of food because the price of goods in the Far West region is higher than elsewhere in NSW.<sup>678</sup> Another Wilcannia resident further highlighted

<sup>674</sup> Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 5.

<sup>675</sup> [Submission 35](#), p 9.

<sup>676</sup> [Submission 21](#), Country Women's Association of NSW, p 2; [Submission 19](#), Regional Development Australia Far West, p 6; [Submission 31](#), p 1; Dick Wagner, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 2; Vicki Chorlton, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Rita Bruggy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>677</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 7; [Submission 9](#), Vicki Chorlton, p 1; [Submission 10](#), p 1; [Submission 15](#), Mr Roy Butler MP, p 5; [Submission 19](#), p 6; Dick Wagner, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), pp 2, 8; Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16; Vicki Chorlton, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 4; Jill Schinella, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 8; Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 28; Penelope Clarke, Member, Western Division Council, NSW Farmers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 37; Luke Driscoll, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 47.

<sup>678</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.

that every resident in the community would have to spend 'up to at least \$150' in fuel costs just to drive to Broken Hill in order to buy food.<sup>679</sup>

- 6.43 Residents of the Far West told us about eligibility issues, despite being significantly impacted by the electricity outages emergency.<sup>680</sup> For example, Mr Leroy Johnson said he could not qualify for the \$200 relief payment to households because his main residence was at Mutawintji, despite doing his home dialysis in his rental at Broken Hill.<sup>681</sup>
- 6.44 Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, also noted that there was a two-week gap between when the grant funding was announced and when people could apply for these grants.<sup>682</sup> However, he said this delay was 'understandable' because Service NSW did not already have a system for delivering the grants.<sup>683</sup>
- 6.45 Many affected residents highlighted the difficulty of applying for these grants, noting the process was not readily accessible. We also heard about significant challenges they had proving their eligibility to receive the Service NSW grants. In summary, inquiry participants noted the following issues with accessing the grants offered by Service NSW:
- There was a lot of documentation required as part of the application, including both the forms and required documentary evidence.<sup>684</sup> This was administratively burdensome and required some people to return to Assistance Centres a number of times.<sup>685</sup>
  - Many people in the region couldn't meet the documentary requirements e.g. many residents did not necessarily have a residential address or otherwise did not have accepted documentary proof of that address.<sup>686</sup> In particular, we heard many Aboriginal community members in Wilcannia did not have access to the required identification documents.<sup>687</sup>
  - Residents found the online application process difficult to access or navigate.<sup>688</sup> We heard stories from residents about waiting for callbacks from Service NSW for help to apply for the grants, which never came.<sup>689</sup>

<sup>679</sup> Rhonda Hynch, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 16.

<sup>680</sup> [Submission 3](#), Mr Leroy Johnson, p 1; [Submission 14](#), Silver City Car Wash, p 1; [Submission 30](#), Ms Anita O'Connor, p 1; [Submission 31](#), p 1.

<sup>681</sup> [Submission 3](#), p 1.

<sup>682</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 8.

<sup>683</sup> Roy Butler MP, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>684</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 8; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 6; Phyllis Ainsworth, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 6.

<sup>685</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 8.

<sup>686</sup> [Submission 15](#), p 9; Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Melissa Thomson, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18; Rebecca Young, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18; Tracey Hotchin, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18; Emma McLean, [Transcript of evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 18; Dick Wagner, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (White Cliffs), p 7.

<sup>687</sup> Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.

<sup>688</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Lorraine Looney, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 10.

<sup>689</sup> Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 27-28.

- 6.46 We were told that Legal Aid NSW's Disaster Response Legal Service met with Service NSW to identify the barriers for vulnerable clients to accessing the grants, particularly around the strict identification proof requirements.<sup>690</sup> The Service advocated for these proof requirements to not be too strict that they act as a barrier for vulnerable community members accessing the grants.<sup>691</sup>
- 6.47 Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director at Service NSW acknowledged that the main issue for these customers was the proof of identity and address requirements. However, he also cautioned that the agency's role included balancing the need to assist customers with managing fraud in the grants process.<sup>692</sup>
- 6.48 Service NSW provided general services at the Broken Hill RAP, including helping people to apply for these grants. In addition to assisting people to set up online accounts and use the mobile app, we heard that staff also helped people to apply for new or replacement birth certificates.<sup>693</sup> Mr Wells, Service NSW noted that they were able to assist 10,249 customers with the grants through the RAP and their Mobile Service Centres.<sup>694</sup>
- 6.49 Stakeholders appreciated being able to seek in-person help with the grants process at Assistance Centres set up by the Reconstruction Authority and Mobile Service Centres by Service NSW. However, there were reports of large crowds and long waiting times at these centres, with some having to queue in high temperatures.<sup>695</sup> These accessibility issues were particularly significant for people with disability. National Disability Services told us about reports from NDIS service coordinators that some groups of people with disability who visited in person for Service NSW support waited up to six hours to process grants.<sup>696</sup>
- 6.50 The challenges with eligibility and applying for the grants outlined above discouraged many affected residents.<sup>697</sup> We heard stories of people and businesses in the Far West region not applying for grants, even if eligible, because it was not worth their time, especially where the grants would not come close to covering their losses.<sup>698</sup>
- 6.51 Given the significant impacts on communities as outlined in Chapter Two, it is concerning to consider that some residents and businesses were not able to access the available grants. As noted in that chapter, the Committee is aware that some residents in outlying towns including Wilcannia are still unable to replace damaged whitegoods like fridges some six months after the emergency.
- 6.52 Service NSW informed us that, of the total \$4.5 million available for the grant funding, \$2.22 million had been paid to individual and business grant applicants

<sup>690</sup> Elizabeth Lehmann, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, p 28.

<sup>691</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 2.

<sup>692</sup> Greg Wells, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14

<sup>693</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Service NSW, p 3.

<sup>694</sup> Greg Wells, [Evidence](#), 17 March 2025, p 14

<sup>695</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 8-9; [Submission 31](#), p 1; Jennifer Thwaites, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 7; Eliza South, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2025, pp 27-28.

<sup>696</sup> [Submission 12](#), p 8.

<sup>697</sup> Michelle Kelly, [Evidence](#), 3 March 2025, p 6; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.

<sup>698</sup> [Submission 15](#), pp 8-9; [Submission 19](#), p 6; Michael Kennedy, [Evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 4.



as of 1 April 2025. They further noted that approximately \$75,000 worth of grants were still to be processed and paid.<sup>699</sup> This would suggest around \$2.2 million of surplus grant funds may not have been claimed. The Committee has recommended that the NSW Government consider utilising this unclaimed grant funding administered by Service NSW to provide additional financial support for vulnerable communities of the region who were affected by the emergency to aid their recovery and improve resilience.

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<sup>699</sup> [Answers to questions](#), Service NSW, p 2.

## Appendix One – Terms of reference

That the Committee on Environment and Planning inquire into and report on the major electricity outages and disruptions in the Far West region of New South Wales in October 2024, including:

- a. the preparation and mitigation strategies in place by the electricity providers in Far West NSW in the event of a major electricity outage.
- b. the overall effectiveness of the preparation and mitigation strategies,
- c. the role of relevant NSW Government agencies and local government in preparing for and responding to major electricity outages,
- d. the implementation of recommendations from previous electricity outages in Far West NSW,
- e. recommendations on future alternative power supply emergency response and effective redundancy, and
- f. any other related matters.

## Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry

The Committee on Environment and Planning received a referral of an inquiry into the major electricity outages affecting the Far West region of New South Wales in October 2024 from the Minister for Energy, the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, on 18 November 2024.

On 21 November 2024, the Committee resolved to accept the referral with amended terms of reference and requested an extension of time to table the report on the inquiry. The amended terms of reference is at Appendix One.

The Committee received a private briefing on 3 February 2025 from two representatives for the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water:

- Mr Jamie Caldwell, Director, Energy Operations and Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator (EUSFAC), and
- Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director and NSW Jurisdictional System Security Coordinator.

Submissions were open to the public on 3 December 2024, and closed on 10 February 2025. The Committee received 48 submissions from various stakeholders including community members from the Far West region, local councils, local community organisations, non-government and not-for-profit organisations, the private sector, electricity network service providers, independent energy regulators and NSW Government agencies. A list of submission makers is at Appendix Four, and the submissions are available on the inquiry [webpage](#).

Between 3 and 6 March 2025, the Committee travelled to the Far West region. Four public hearings and five town hall meetings were held at various locations in Menindee, Tibooburra, White Cliffs, Wilcannia and Broken Hill. A report on the Committee's site visit is at Appendix Three.

A further public hearing was held at Parliament House on 17 March 2025. Across these six hearings and five town hall meetings, the Committee heard from local community members and businesses from the Far West, community representatives and non-government organisations, industry representative bodies, private sector businesses, telecommunications and electricity service providers, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, independent energy regulators, local councils, the local State MP and government agencies. Appendix Five is a list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings. A transcript of evidence taken at each hearing and town hall meeting is on the inquiry [webpage](#).

The Committee also received additional information from NSW Government agencies as answers to written questions, in lieu of appearing at a public hearing. These answers, alongside answers from inquiry participants to questions taken on notice at a hearing and supplementary written questions from the Committee are available on the inquiry [webpage](#).

## Appendix Three – Site visit report

As part of the inquiry, the Committee travelled to the Broken Hill and Far West NSW in order to hear directly from impacted community members across the region about how people managed the emergency period without reliable power, the impacts on them and the emergency response and support from relevant organisations and businesses. This site visit involved both committee public hearings and informal town hall meetings where community members were welcome to turn up and speak to the Committee without needing to be sworn in as a witness.

On Monday 3 March, the Committee travelled to Menindee to hold the first public hearing and town hall meeting (which was not transcribed) where we heard from the Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Menindee Headquarters Brigade of the NSW Rural Fire Service, the Menindee branch of the Country Women's Association, the Silverton Village Committee and community members. Witnesses told us about the difficulties they experienced accessing information and emergency support during the outages and how they supported each other over that period.

On Tuesday 4 March, the Committee travelled to Tibooburra and heard from a number of residents of the Corner Country at both the public hearing and town hall meeting, including people who live on remote cattle stations in the area. In Tibooburra, we heard how remoteness and isolation were key challenges during the emergency for their community, which already often experiences power disruptions, and the resilience they displayed to support each other over that period.

On the morning of Wednesday 5 March, the Committee held a town hall meeting in White Cliffs. Local residents talked about how the outages impacted the small town, particularly more vulnerable residents, and also raised issues with the impacts of isolation and remoteness on the emergency response and assistance provided by government. After the town hall meeting, the Committee then travelled to Wilcannia to hold a public hearing and town hall meeting where we heard from the Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Central Darling Shire Council and local residents. The witnesses and town hall participants talked about the delays in receiving important information and accessing government assistance that was experienced by Wilcannia.

The final day of the site visit was Thursday 6 March where we held a town hall meeting and public hearing in Broken Hill. At the town hall meeting, the Committee heard from residents of Broken Hill, including many who made submissions to the inquiry, about the wide-ranging impacts of the emergency. Community organisations, local businesses and service providers, non-profit organisations and other advocacy groups, alternative energy service providers in the region, the Barkandji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Broken Hill City Council, Telstra, Essential Energy and Transgrid appeared at the public hearing to discuss the impacts of the emergency, the emergency response and the inherent challenges in the Far West electricity network. Shortly after returning to Sydney, the Committee also held another public hearing on Monday 17 March.

By hearing directly from communities and travelling over 1,000 km across the region, the site visit helped inform the Committee about the unique characteristics of the region and the realities of distance and isolation for its residents. Transcripts of all public hearings and most town hall meetings held in the Far West are available on the inquiry [webpage](#).

## Appendix Four – Submissions

No.	Author
1	Mrs Sheryl Rowlands
2	Reverend Arthur Hall
3	Mr Leroy Johnson
4	Central Darling Shire Council
5	Confidential
6	Mr Bob McKeon
7	Mr Adam Hellyer
8	Michael and Rita Bruggy
9	Vicki Chorlton
10	Mrs Helen Murray
11	Mrs Barbara Webster
12	National Disability Services
13	Mr Nicholas Pratt
14	Silver City Car Wash
15	Mr Roy Butler
16	Broken Hill City Council
17	Mr Paul Miskelly
18	Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS
19	Regional Development Australia Far West
20	Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD)
21	Country Women's Association of NSW
22	Mr Grant Boylan
23	Ms Elaine Gillett
24	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART)
25	Tilt Renewables
26	ClubsNSW
27	Rainforest Reserves Australia
28	Transgrid
29	AGL Energy Limited
30	Ms Anita O'Connor
31	Mr Justin Lohmann
32	Mr Zane Smith

No.	Author
33	Essential Energy
34	Mr Gerry Leaver
35	NSW Government
36	Outback Astronomy
37	Broken Hill Musicians' Club
38	IGA Broken Hill
39	Name suppressed
40	NSW Police Force Western Region Office
41	NSW Farmers Western Division Council
42	Hydrostor
43	Australian Energy Regulator
44	Dr Peter Hill
45	Ms Lynette LaBlack
46	Telstra Corporation Limited
47	Mr Dick Wagner
48	Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation



## Appendix Five – Witnesses and town hall participants

**3 March 2025**

**Menindee Civic Hall, Menindee, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Barbara Stephens	Country Women's Association, Menindee
Graeme McCrabb	RFS Captain, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS
Helen Murray	Committee Secretary, Silverton Village Committee
Ian Green	President, Silverton Village Committee
Lorraine Looney	Country Women's Association Secretary, Country Women's Association, Menindee
Margot Muscat	President, Country Women's Association, Menindee
Michelle Kelley	Menindee Aboriginal Lands Council
Peter Price	Treasurer, Silverton Village Committee
Rena Callow	Country Women's Association, Menindee
Rob Gregory	Volunteer Firefighter, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS
Rob Woods	Secretary, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS

### **Town hall participants**

Nil recorded (town hall not transcribed).

**4 March 2025**

**Albert Hall, Tibooburra, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Mia Degoumois	Packsaddle Roadhouse
Phyllis Ainsworth	Tibooburra and District Progress Association
Tracey Hotchin	Tibooburra Village Committee

### **Town hall participants**

Anny O'Connor

Dennis Degussa

Emma McLean

Melissa Thomson
Mia Degoumois
Rebecca Young
Tracey Hotchin
Unidentified person
Vicki Jackson

**5 March 2025****White Cliffs Hotel, White Cliffs, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Nil	
<b>Town hall participants</b>	
Ann Scott	
Dick Wagner	
Lindsay White	
Matt Young	
Russell Wagner	
Sarah Ker	

**5 March 2025****Wilcannia Community Hall, Wilcannia, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Greg Hill	General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council
Jennifer Thwaites	Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council
Michael Kennedy	Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council
<b>Town hall participants</b>	
Bill Elliott	
Pat Barraclough	
Rhonda Hynch	
William Murray	

**6 March 2025****Broken Hill Civic Centre, Broken Hill, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Annie Pearson	Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy
Bronwyn Clere	Operations and Management Executive, InfraCo. , Telstra Corporation Limited
Bruce Byrne	Chief Operating Officer, Perilya
David Beavers	Head of Organisation, Tilt Renewables
David Bowly	Operations Manager of Battery Energy Storage Systems, AGL Energy Limited
David Nardi	Head of Major Projects and Transmission Services, Essential Energy
David O'Hara	General Manager of Projects, Transgrid
Dimity Philip	Broken Hill Westhaven, National Disability Services
Elen Welch	Policy Director - Socio Economics, NSW Farmers Western Division Council
Eliza South	Country Women's Association, Broken Hill Branch
Elizabeth Lehmann	Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service , Legal Aid NSW
Gerard Glover	Chair (Brewarrina), NSW Farmers Western Division Council
Gerard Tracey	Group Owner, End to End Service Performance & Resilience, Telstra Corporation Limited
Gerry Leaver	Business Far West
Heather Picken	Treasurer, Meals on Wheels, Broken Hill
Helen Miller	General Manager of In Home Supports and Clinical Lead , National Disability Services
Jason Harvey	Outback Pharmacies
Jay Nankivell	Acting General Manager, Broken Hill City Council
John Braes	Acting General Manager, Perilya
John McCormack	General Manager Stakeholder Engagement, AGL Energy Limited
Jon Norman	President, Hydrostor
Lachlan Gall	Councillor, Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD)
Leroy Johnson	
Lisa McTiernan	Manager, Government Relations, Telstra Corporation Limited
Luke Driscoll	CEO, Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
Marie Jordan	Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Martin Becker	Senior Vice President Origination & Development , Hydrostor
Michael Boland	Broken Hill Musicians' Club
Michael Williams	Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West
Nathan Vass	Head of Government Affairs and Media, Tilt Renewables
Paul Harrison	National Emergency Manager, Incident Operations, Telstra Corporation Limited
Penelope Clarke	Member, White Cliffs, NSW Farmers Western Division Council, NSW Farmers Western Division Council
Rosie Siemer	Executive Committee Member, Business Far West
Simon Sawday	Senior Policy Officer, ClubsNSW
Terry Smith	President, Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD)
Todd Ferguson	Organiser, Mining and Energy Union , Broken Hill
Tom Kennedy	Mayor, Broken Hill City Council
<b>Town hall participants</b>	
Ashley Byrne	
Barbara Webster	
Jill Schinella	
Michael Bruggy	
Michael Schinella	
Rita Bruggy	
Stephen Pascoe	
Vicki Chorlton	

**17 March 2025****Parliament House, Preston Stanley Room, Sydney, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM	Assistant Commissioner, Western Region Office, NSW Police Force Western Region Office
Dr Sarah Wenham	Executive Director Medical Services, Far West Local Health District, NSW Health
Inspector David Botha	NSW Police Force Western Region Office
Mr Andrew Nicholls PSM	Chief Executive Officer, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART)
Mr Greg Wells	Managing Director, Service NSW

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Mr Jamie Caldwell	Operations   Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator (EUSFAC) Energy & Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA) Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEWS)
Mr Jim Henry	Executive Director, Disaster Preparation and Recovery, Service NSW
Mr Jonathan Coppel	Tribunal Member, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART)
Mr Josh Weston	Manager Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit, NSW Telco Authority
Mr Justin Oliver	Deputy Chair, Australian Energy Regulator
Mr Liam Ryan	Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEWS)
Mr Peter McKechnie	Deputy Commissioner
Mr Roy Butler MP	Member for Barwon
Mr Shane Hamilton	Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW
Ms Kelly Kwan	Executive Director, Regulation and Compliance , Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART)
Ms Rania Wannous	Chief Commercial Officer, NSW Telco Authority

## Appendix Six – Extracts from minutes

### Minutes of meeting no 15

TIME & DATE: 10.08AM, 21 NOVEMBER 2024

ROOM 1254

### Members present

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan and Ms Kellie Sloane.

### Officers present

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

### AGENDA ITEM

#### 1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the minutes of the meeting of 30 October 2024 be confirmed.

#### 2. \*\*\*

#### 3. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024

The Committee considered the referral of an inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024.

##### 3.1 Referral of the inquiry and terms of reference

The Committee considered the letter dated 18 November 2024 from the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Heritage, referring an inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024.

The Committee considered the draft terms of reference.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell:

- That the Committee conduct an inquiry into and report on the major electricity outages and disruptions in the Far West region of New South Wales in October 2024, including:
  - a. the preparation and mitigation strategies in place by electricity providers in Far West NSW in the event of a major electricity outage,
  - b. the overall effectiveness of the preparation and mitigation strategies,
  - c. the role of relevant NSW Government agencies and local government in preparing for and responding to major electricity outages,
  - d. the implementation of recommendations from previous electricity outages in Far West NSW,



- e. recommendations on future alternative power supply emergency response and effective redundancy,
  - f. the effectiveness of providers' communications strategies regarding electricity outages and responses, and
  - g. any other related matters.
- That the Chair write to the Minister for Energy accepting the referral of the inquiry, advising of the slightly amended terms of reference, and indicating that the Committee will aim to report in April – May 2025.

### **3.2 Suggested inquiry timeline**

The Committee considered the attached proposed timeline for the inquiry and agreed to hold hearings in the Far West region of NSW in early March 2025.

Mrs Hannan declared that her brother-in-law's son is employed as highway patrol in Broken Hill.

### **3.3 Submissions process**

The Committee discussed a proposed submissions process for the inquiry.

The Committee also considered an approach to identifying stakeholders and noted that a preliminary suggested stakeholders list will be circulated at the next meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the secretariat provide a draft suggested stakeholders list on a confidential basis to Mr Roy Butler MP and liaise with Mr Butler regarding the draft suggested stakeholders list.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart:

- That the Committee call for submissions on 3 December 2024 to be received by 10 February 2025.
- That the secretariat prioritise processing submissions that are over 250 words in length.

Ms Sloane left the meeting at 10:39am.

### **3.4 Private briefings**

The Committee discussed receiving a private briefing on the inquiry from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell That the Committee meet and receive a private briefing with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, to be held on 26 November 2024 subject to the Departmental representatives' availability.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That, following the private briefing, the secretariat circulate confidential notes to the Committee.

**4. \*\*\***

**5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 10.44am until 11am, Tuesday 26 November 2024.

**Minutes of meeting no. 16**

TIME & DATE: 11.34AM, 26 NOVEMBER 2024

LOCATION: MEETING ROOM 1254 AND VIA WEBEX

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair) (by Webex), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair) (by Webex), and Mrs Judy Hannan (by Webex).

**APOLOGIES**

Ms Maryanne Stuart and Ms Kellie Sloane.

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran and Lloyd Connolly.

**AGENDA ITEM**

**1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the minutes of the meeting of 21 November 2024 be confirmed.

**2. \*\*\***

**3. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**3.1 Suggested stakeholders**

The Committee considered the attached list of suggested stakeholders to be invited to make a written submission.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan:

- That the Committee invite the attached listed stakeholders, the additional stakeholders proposed by Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, the individual branches and brigades of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW State Emergency Service, Volunteer Rescue Association NSW and any additional stakeholders as agreed to make a written submission.
- That any additional stakeholders proposed via email by members by 3 December 2024 be invited to make a written submission, unless an objection is raised by any member.
- That the secretariat circulate by email an updated list of agreed stakeholders to be invited to make a submission to the Committee.

### **3.2 Private briefing**

The Committee agreed to postpone the proposed private briefing from the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to January 2025, and that the secretariat canvas members' availabilities for holding the briefing on 20 January 2025.

### **3.3 Regional hearings in Far West NSW**

The Committee considered dates for the proposed hearings in the Far West region of NSW.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the Committee, subject to funding approval, conduct site visits and public hearings in the Far West region of New South Wales from 3 to 7 March 2025.

### **4. \*\*\***

### **5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 11.50am until 20 January 2025.

## **Minutes of meeting no. 17**

TIME & DATE: 10.34AM, 17 JANUARY 2025

LOCATION: BY WEBEX

### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair) (by Webex), Ms Maryanne Stuart (by Webex), Ms Kellie Sloane (by Webex) and Mrs Judy Hannan (by Webex).

### **Apologies**

Mrs Sally Quinnell.

### **Officer present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Alex Read (by Webex) and Lloyd Connolly.

### **1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 26 November 2024 be confirmed.

## **2. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

### **2.1 Regional hearings in Far West NSW**

The Committee noted the previous resolution of 26 November 2024 that, subject to funding approval from the Speaker, site visits and public hearings be conducted in the Far West region of New South Wales from 3 to 7 March 2025.

The Committee considered the draft proposed itinerary for hearings in the Far West region of NSW.

Discussion ensued.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 10.48am until 3 February 2025 at 1.30pm

**Minutes of Meeting no. 18**

TIME & DATE: 1.33PM, 3 FEBRUARY 2025

LOCATION: ROOM 1043 AND BY WEBEX

**Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair) (by Webex), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Ms Kellie Sloane (by Webex) and Mrs Judy Hannan.

**Apologies**

Nil.

**Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joan Douce, Alex Read, Lloyd Connolly, Janish Hettigama and Tayla Green-Aldridge.

**AGENDA ITEM**

**1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 17 January 2025 be confirmed.

**2. \*\*\***

**3. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**3.1 Briefing with representatives from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Attachment C)**

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the Committee admit the following representatives from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to conduct a private briefing:

- Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director — Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability
- Mr Jamie Caldwell, Director, Energy Operations | Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator (EUSFAC), Energy & Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA)
- Mr James Higgins (by Webex), Energy Lead, Office of Minister Penny Sharpe MLC

Mr Ryan, Mr Caldwell and Mr Higgins joined the meeting at 1 pm and provided a private briefing on the electricity outages affecting the Far West region of NSW in October 2024.

Mr Ryan, Mr Caldwell and Mr Higgins left the meeting at 2.58 pm.

### **3.2 Submissions**

The Committee noted that 10 submissions have been received to date and the closing deadline is 10 February 2025.

### **3.3 Regional hearings in Far West NSW**

The Committee noted the attached proposed itinerary for the regional hearings in Far West NSW.

### **4. Next Meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 3.06pm until a date to be determined

### **Minutes of meeting no. 19**

TIME & DATE: 2.32PM, 18 FEBRUARY 2025

LOCATION: ROOM 1043

#### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mr James Wallace and Mrs Judy Hannan.

#### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joan Douce, Alex Read, Lloyd Connolly and Janish Hettigama.  
AGENDA ITEM

#### **1. Committee Membership**

The Chair informed the Committee of the appointment of James Wallace, in place of Kellie Sloane, as recorded item 10(1) of the Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings of 18 February 2025:

**Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings no. 94, 18 February 2025, entry no. 10:**

#### **10 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Mr Ron Hoenig moved, pursuant to notice, That:

- (1) James Wallace be appointed to serve on the Committee on Environment and Planning in place of Kellie Sloane, discharged.

...

Question put and passed.

#### **2. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell, seconded Mrs Hannan: That the minutes of the meeting of 3 February 2025 be confirmed.

**3. \*\*\***

**4. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**4.1 Submissions**

The Committee considered the extension request granted by the Chair to the Australian Energy Regulator to make a late submission by Monday, 24 February 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace, seconded Ms Stuart: That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to the consideration of the proposed late submission from the Australian Energy Regulator:

- Upon receipt of the submission, the secretariat to the Committee circulate by email a copy of the submission and proposed resolution regarding the acceptance and publication of the submission.
- The Committee accept and publish the submission from the Australian Energy Regulator in accordance with the proposed resolution circulated by email, unless any objections are raised within 24 hours of the email circulating the submission and proposed resolution.

The Committee noted that 41 submissions were received by 11 February 2024. The Committee considered accepting and publishing submissions received and the suggested publication table that was separately circulated to members.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded Mrs Hannan:

- That the Committee accept and publish submissions 1-4, 6-14, 16-33, 35 and 40-42.
- That the Committee accept and keep confidential submission 5.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 15, including the letter from a constituent on page 12, pending receipt of the constituent's consent.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 34 as partially confidential with redaction of identified statement on page 4.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 36 as partially confidential with redaction of identified statements on page 6.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 37 as partially confidential with redaction of name on page 4, names on page 22 and appendix 23 at pages 30-33.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 38 as partially confidential with redaction of attachments.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 39 as partially confidential with name suppressed.

**4.2 Suggested witnesses and proposed schedules for regional hearings in Far West NSW**

The Committee considered proposed hearing schedules for the regional hearings in Far West NSW, including conducting transcribed town hall meetings, and the attached list of suggested witnesses.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan:



- That the Committee invite the listed stakeholders and any agreed additional stakeholders to appear at a public hearing.
- That the Committee conduct public hearings on 3, 4, 5 and 6 March 2025, including a town hall meeting on each date, in accordance with the attached proposed hearing schedules, noting that times and witnesses may change depending on availability.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That the Committee invite nominated stakeholders to attend the town hall meeting in Broken Hill on 6 March 2025, as agreed by email.

**5. \*\*\***

**6. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 2.59pm until 3 March 2025 at 1.30pm.

**Minutes of meeting no. 20**

TIME & DATE: 1.55PM, 3 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: MENINDEE COMMUNITY HALL

**Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan and Mr James Wallace.

**Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joseph Stewart, Shanshan Guo, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

**AGENDA ITEM**

**Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

**1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 18 February 2025 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**2.1 Submission**

The Committee noted that, in accordance with the resolution of 18 February 2025, the secretariat circulated by email a proposed resolution regarding the acceptance and publication of submission 43 on 21 February 2025 and no objections were received within 24 hours.

The Committee further noted that, in accordance with the proposed resolution, the Committee accepted and published submission 43.

## **2.2 \*\*\***

### **2.3 Consideration of minutes for remaining meetings**

The Committee agreed to defer the confirmation of minutes of any remaining meetings to be held during the Committee's travel in Far West NSW to the meeting on 17 March 2025.

### **2.4 Additional town hall meeting**

The Committee considered the updated hearing schedules for the regional hearings in Far West NSW, which was separately circulated.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the Committee also conduct a town hall meeting in White Cliffs on 5 March 2025.

### **2.5 Media orders**

The Committee considered permitting the media to record, photograph and broadcast the day's public proceedings.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That the Committee authorises the photography of the public proceedings on 3 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

### **2.6 Answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions**

The Committee considered the timeframe for questions taken on notice and the process for supplementary questions for each hearing to be held on 3 to 6 March 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell:

- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions for each hearing held by the Committee on 3, 4, 5 and 6 March 2025:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Wednesday 12 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 13 March 2025.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

### **2.7 Audio visual recording**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart:

- That the Committee permit the audio-visual recording of the evidence of Mr McCrabb at today's public hearing.
- That only secretariat and Hansard staff access the recording, and delete the recording after the corrected transcript of today's hearing is published.

## **2.8 Public hearing**

The Chair opened the public hearing at 2.13pm. Auntie Dorothy Stephens delivered a Welcome to Country.

At 2.18pm, the Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was admitted:

- Ms Michelle Kelly, Director, Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined.

Ms Kelly made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Margot Muscat, President, Country Women's Association, Menindee, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Lorraine Looney, Secretary, Country Women's Association Menindee, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Barbara Stephens, International Officer, Country Women's Association, Menindee, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Rena Callow, Country Women's Association, Menindee, affirmed and examined.

Ms Muscat made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Graeme McCrabb, Captain, Rural Fire Service, Menindee, appearing by videoconference, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Rob Woods, Secretary, Rural Fire Service, Menindee, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Rob Gregory, Volunteer and Contractor, Rural Fire Service, Menindee, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Ian Green, President, Silverton Village Committee, affirmed and examined,
- Mr Peter Price, Treasurer, Silverton Village Committee, affirmed and examined,
- Ms Helen Murray, Secretary, Silverton Village Committee, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Murray made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 4.39pm.

## **2.9 Town hall meeting**

The Chair opened the town hall meeting at 4.50pm and made an opening statement.

The Chair closed the town hall meeting at 5.28pm.

### **3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 5.28pm until 4 March 2025 at 1.45pm.

#### **Minutes of meeting no. 21**

TIME & DATE: 2.26PM, 4 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: ALBERT HALL, TIBOOBURRA

#### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan (by Webex) and Mr James Wallace.

#### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joseph Stewart, Shanshan Guo, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

#### **AGENDA ITEM**

##### **Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **1.1 Publication orders for committee proceedings on 3 March 2025.**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of yesterday's public evidence.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given yesterday be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage.

##### **1.2 Media orders**

The Committee considered permitting the media to photograph the day's public proceedings.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee authorises the photography of the public proceedings on 4 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

##### **1.3 Answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions**

The Committee noted the resolution of 3 March 2025 regarding the timeframe for questions taken on notice and the process for supplementary questions for today's hearing:

- The following process applies in relation to supplementary questions:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Wednesday 12 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 13 March 2025.

- Witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

#### **1.4 Public hearing**

The Chair opened the public hearing at 2.33pm and made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Mia Degoumois, Packsaddle Roadhouse, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Tracey Hotchin, Tibooburra Village Committee, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Phyllis Ainsworth, Tibooburra Village Committee, sworn and examined.

Ms Ainsworth and Ms Hotchin each made an opening statement.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 3.21pm.

#### **1.5 Town hall meeting**

The Chair opened the town hall meeting at 3.35pm and made an opening statement.

The Chair closed the town hall meeting at 4.12pm.

#### **2. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 4.12pm until 5 March 2025 at 8.10am.

#### **Minutes of meeting no. 22**

TIME & DATE: 8.17AM, 5 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: WHITE CLIFFS HOTEL

#### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan and Mr James Wallace.

#### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joseph Stewart, Shanshan Guo, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

#### **AGENDA ITEM**

##### **Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **1.1 Publication orders for committee proceedings on 4 March 2025.**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of yesterday's public evidence.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell:

- That the corrected transcript of public evidence given yesterday be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage.
- That the uncorrected transcript of the town hall meeting held yesterday be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage alongside the corrected hearing transcript, unless any objections by the Committee or attendees to the publication of identified statements or names is provided within 2 business days of receiving the uncorrected transcript.

### **1.2 Media orders for town hall meeting**

The Committee considered permitting the media to photograph the town hall meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the Committee authorises the photography of the town hall meeting on 5 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

### **1.3 Town hall meeting**

The Chair opened the town hall meeting at 8.25am and made an opening statement.

The town hall meeting closed at 9:05am

### **Post-hearing deliberative meeting**

### **1.4 Publication orders**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of today's town hall meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That the uncorrected transcript of the town hall meeting held today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage, unless any objections by the Committee or attendees to the publication of identified statements or names is provided within 2 business days of receiving the uncorrected transcript.

## **2. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 9.10am until 5 March 2025 at 11.15am.

### **Minutes of meeting no. 23**

TIME & DATE: 11.05AM, 5 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: WILCANNIA COMMUNITY HALL AND VIA WEBEX

### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan and Mr James Wallace.

### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joseph Stewart, Shanshan Guo, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **1.1 Media orders**

The Committee considered permitting the media to photograph the day's public proceedings.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hannan: That the Committee authorises the photography of the public proceedings on 5 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

##### **1.2 Answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions**

The Committee noted the resolution of 3 March 2025 regarding the timeframe for questions taken on notice and the process for supplementary questions for today's hearing:

- The following process applies in relation to supplementary questions:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Wednesday 12 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 13 March 2025.
- Witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

##### **1.3 Public hearing**

The Chair opened the public hearing at 11.07am and made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Jennifer Thwaites, President, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined,
- Mr Michael Kennedy, Chairperson, Wilcannia Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined.

Ms Thwaites made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted by videoconference:

- Mr Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, affirmed and examined.

Mr Hill made a short opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.



The Chair closed the public hearing at 12.19pm.

#### **1.4 Town hall meeting**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee authorise a photographer from ABC Broken Hill to take photographs of today's town hall meeting, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023 and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair opened the town hall meeting at 12.27pm and made an opening statement.

The Chair closed the town hall meeting at 1.11pm.

#### **2. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.11pm until 6 March 2025 at 8.00am.

#### **Minutes of meeting no. 24**

TIME & DATE: 8.12AM, 6 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: BROKEN HILL CIVIC CENTRE AND VIA WEBEX

#### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan and Mr James Wallace.

#### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joseph Stewart, Shanshan Guo, Alex Read and Lloyd Connolly.

#### **AGENDA ITEM**

#### **Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **1.1 Publication orders for proceedings on 5 March 2025**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of yesterday's proceedings in Wilcannia.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell:

- That the corrected transcript of public evidence given yesterday in Wilcannia Community Hall be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage.
- That the uncorrected transcript of the town hall meeting held yesterday in Wilcannia Community Hall be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage alongside the corrected hearing transcript, unless any objections by the

Committee or attendees to the publication of identified statements or names is provided within 2 business days of receiving the uncorrected transcript.

### **1.2 Submissions**

The Committee noted the extension granted to Telstra to make a written submission by 28 February 2025.

The Committee considered accepting and publishing submissions received after the submission close date.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace:

- That the Committee accept and publish submission 44 and 46.
- That the Committee accept and publish submission 45 as partially confidential with redaction of attachments.

### **1.3 Media orders for public hearing**

The Committee considered permitting the media to record, photograph and broadcast the day's public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 6 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

### **1.4 Answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions**

The Committee noted the resolution of 3 March 2025 regarding the timeframe for questions taken on notice and the process for supplementary questions for today's hearing:

- The following process applies in relation to supplementary questions:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Wednesday 12 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 13 March 2025.
- Witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

## **2. Town hall meeting**

The Committee considered the list of stakeholders invited to speak at today's town hall meeting, as agreed by email on 25 and 26 February 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee invite the following stakeholders to appear at the town hall meeting on 6 March 2025:

- Sheryl Rowlands
- Adam Hellyer
- Michael and Rita Bruggy
- Vicki Chorlton
- Barbara Webster
- Nicholas Pratt
- Paul Fogarty
- Grant Boylan
- Elaine Gillett
- Justin Lohmann
- Zane Smith
- Gerry Leaver
- Travis and Linda Nadge
- Michael Schinella

The Chair opened the town hall meeting at 8.20am and made an opening statement.

The Chair closed the town hall meeting at 9.12am.

## **2.1 Public hearing**

The Chair opened the public hearing at 9.31am and made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Michael Boland, General Manager, Broken Hill Musicians Club, sworn and examined.
- Mr Simon Sawday, Director of Government Relations, ClubsNSW, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Gerry Leaver, Executive Committee Member, Business Far West, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Rosie Siemer, Executive Committee, Business Far West, affirmed and examined.

Mr Sawday, Mr Boland and Ms Siemer each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Todd Ferguson, Organiser, Mining and Energy Union, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Bruce Byrne, Chief Operating Officer, Perilya, affirmed and examined.
- Mr John Braes, Acting General Manager, Perilya, affirmed and examined.

Mr Byrne and Mr Ferguson each made an operating statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Heather Picken, Treasurer, Meals on Wheels, Broken Hill, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Eliza South, Country Women's Association, Broken Hill, affirmed and examined.

- Ms Elizabeth Lehmann, via videoconference, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, affirmed and examined.

Ms Picken, Ms South and Ms Lehmann each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Tanoa Bugmy delivered a Welcome to Country.

The following witnesses were admitted.

- Mr Michael Williams, Chief Executive Officer and Director Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Far West, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Gerard Glover, Western Division Council, Chair, NSW Farmers, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Penelope Clarke, Western Division Council Member, NSW Farmers, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Elen Welch, Policy Director Socio-Economics, NSW Farmers, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Terry Smith, President, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, sworn and examined.
- Mr Lachlan Gall, Councillor, Pastoralists' Association of West Darling, sworn and examined.

Mr Williams, Mr Glover and Mr Smith each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Leroy Johnson, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Jason Harvey, Outback Pharmacies, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Dimity Philip, Service Manager, Broken Hill, Westhaven, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Helen Miller (via Webex), General Manager of In Home Supports and Clinical Lead, LiveBetter, National Disability Services, affirmed and examined.

Mr Johnson, Ms Philp, Mr Harvey and Ms Miller each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

- Mr Luke Driscoll, CEO, Barkandji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Tom Kennedy, Mayor, Broken Hill City Council, sworn and examined.
- Mr Jay Nankivell, General Manager, Broken Hill City Council, sworn and examined.

Mr Kennedy made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted by videoconference:

- Mr Paul Harrison, National Emergency Manager, Incident Operations, Telstra, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Lisa McTiernan, Manager, Government Relations, InfraCo, Telstra, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Bronwyn Clere, Operations and Management Executive, Telstra, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Gerard Tracey, Group Owner, End to End Service Performance and Resilience, Telstra, affirmed and examined.

Ms Clere made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr John McCormack, General Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, AGL, sworn and examined.
- Mr David Bowly, Operations Manager, Battery Energy Storage Systems, sworn and examined.
- Mr Nathan Vass, via videoconference, Head of Government Affairs and Media, Tilt Renewables, affirmed and examined.
- Mr David Bears, via videoconference, Head of Origination, Tilt Renewables, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Martin Becker, via videoconference, Senior Vice President, Origination and Development, Hydrstor, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Jon Norman, via videoconference, President, Hydrostor, affirmed and examined.

Mr Becker, Mr Vass and Mr McCormack each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Annie Pearson, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Essential Energy, sworn and examined.
- Mr David Nardi, Head of Major Projects and Transmission Services, Essential Energy, sworn and examined.

Ms Pearson made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Marie Jordan, Executive General Manager of Network, Transgrid, affirmed and examined.
- Mr David O'Hara, General Manager of Projects, Transgrid, affirmed and examined.

Ms Jordan made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 5.33pm.

### **Post-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **2.2 Publication orders**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of today's public evidence, and the town hall meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell:

- That the corrected transcript given today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the committee webpage, subject to the following:
  - The secretariat first review the transcript to redact sections relating to unfair or inaccurate allegations regarding Ashley Byrne.
  - That the redacted transcript then be circulated to members via email, with members having 24 hours to object to any proposed redactions.
- That the uncorrected transcript of the town hall meeting held today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's webpage alongside the corrected hearing transcript, pending any objections by the Committee or attendees to the publication of identified statements or names.

#### **2.3 Acceptance and publication of tendered documents**

The Committee considered accepting and publishing any documents tendered during the hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the Committee accept and publish the following document:

- Briefing paper on the Broken Hill Gas Turbines tendered by Essential Energy.

#### **3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 5.38pm until 17 March 2025 at 11.40am.

#### **Minutes of meeting no. 25**

TIME & DATE: 11.40 AM, 17 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: PRESTON STANLEY ROOM, AND VIA WEBEX

#### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair) (via Webex), Ms Maryanne Stuart, Mrs Judy Hannan (via Webex), and Mr James Wallace.

#### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Alex Read, Joan Douce and Janish Hettigama

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **Pre-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meetings of 3, 4, 5 and 6 March 2025 be confirmed.

#### **2. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **2.1 Submissions**

The Committee considered accepting and publishing the submissions received after the submission close date and during the Committee's travel to Far West NSW.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That the Committee accept and publish submission 47 and 48.

##### **2.2 Briefing with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water**

The Committee considered materials provided by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the Committee notify the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water of its intention to publish the materials provided and to invite the Department to raise any objections regarding publication.

##### **2.3 Media orders for public hearing**

The Committee considered permitting the media to record, photograph and broadcast the day's public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 17 March 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

##### **2.4 Answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions**

The Committee noted agreement by email dated 12 and 13 March 2025 to revising the timeframe for proposing supplementary questions for witnesses appearing at the public hearing on 6 March 2025 in Broken Hill.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Stuart:

- That the Committee adopt the following revised process for supplementary questions for the public hearing on 6 March 2025:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Wednesday 19 March 2025.



- Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 20 March 2025.
- The Committee considered the timeframe for questions taken on notice and the process for supplementary questions for witnesses at today's hearing.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Wallace:

- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions for today's public hearing:
  - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Monday 24 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Tuesday 25 March 2025.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

## 2.5 Public hearing

The Committee noted the agreement by email dated 7, 10 and 13 March 2025 to invite Service NSW to appear at today's public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the Committee invite Service NSW to appear at a public hearing on 17 March 2025.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 11.48am and made an opening statement.

The following witness was admitted:

- Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM, NSW Police Force Western Region Office, sworn and examined.
- Inspector David Botha, NSW Police Force, Western Region Office, affirmed and examined.
- Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie, NSW Rural Fire Service, affirmed and examined.

Deputy Commissioner McKechnie and Assistant Commissioner Holland APM each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Ms Rania Wannous, Chief Customer Officer, NSW Telco Authority, sworn and examined.
- Mr Josh Weston, Manager Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit, Service NSW, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Jim Henry, Executive Director Medical Services, Disaster Preparation and Recovery, Service NSW, affirmed and examined.

Ms Wannous and Mr Wells each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Dr Sarah Wenham, Executive Medical Services, Far West Local Health District, appearing by videoconference, sworn and examined.
- Mr Shane Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, affirmed and examined.

Mr Hamilton and Dr Wenham each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Andrew Nicholls PSM, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW, sworn and examined.
- Mr Jonathan Coppel, Tribunal Member, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW, affirmed and examined.
- Ms Kelly Kwan, Executive Director, Regulation and Compliance, Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Justin Oliver, Deputy Chair, Australian Energy Regulator, sworn and examined.

Mr Oliver and Mr Coppel each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

- Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, affirmed and examined.
- Mr Jamie Caldwell, Director, Energy Operations, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator (EUSFAC), Energy & Utility Service Functional Area (EUSFA), Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, affirmed and examined.

Mr Ryan and Mr Caldwell each made an opening statement. Evidence concluded and witnesses withdrew.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 5.08pm.

### **Post-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **2.6 Publication orders**

The Committee considered publishing the transcript of today's public evidence, and the town hall meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the committee webpage.

#### **3. \*\*\***

#### **4. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

##### **4.1 Additional written evidence**

The Committee considered accepting and publishing the information regarding the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024 provided by the NSW Department of Education on 12 March 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the Committee accept and publish the information regarding the inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024 provided by the NSW Department of Education on 12 March 2025.

The Committee considered sending written questions to other government agencies and organisations in lieu of a further public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart:

- That the Chair on behalf of the Committee send written questions to the following stakeholders and any agreed additional stakeholders, in lieu of appearing at the public hearing on 17 March 2025:
  - NSW Reconstruction Authority
  - NSW State Emergency Service
  - NSW Department of Education
  - Transport for NSW
  - Department of Communities and Justice
- That the following process be adopted for proposing written questions:
  - Members email any proposed written questions by 4pm, Monday 24 March 2025.
  - Secretariat to then circulate draft letters from the Chair attaching all proposed supplementary questions to the Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Tuesday 25 March 2025.
- That the Committee accept the answers to written questions as evidence and publishes them on its webpage with contact details redacted unless any objections are received within 1 business day of receiving the answers.

The Committee considered the timeframe for the inquiry and the proposed reporting date.

Resolved on the motion of Mrs Quinell: That the Committee write to the Minister about the revised inquiry timeline to table the report by late May 2025.

5. \*\*\*

**6. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 5.15pm until the date and time to be determined.

**Minutes of meeting no. 26**

TIME & DATE: 10.03AM, 31 MARCH 2025

LOCATION: ROOM 1043 AND VIA WEBEX

**Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair) (via Webex), Mrs Sally Quinell (Deputy Chair) (via Webex), Ms Maryanne Stuart (via Webex), Mrs Judy Hannan (via Webex) and Mr James Wallace.

**Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Alex Read, Joan Douce, Natasha Moir, Lloyd Connolly and Janish Hettigama.

**AGENDA ITEM**

**1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 17 March 2025 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**2.1 Letter of clarification regarding the transcript of the public hearing on 6 March 2025**

The Committee considered the attached letter with enclosures from Mr Jay Nankivell, General Manager, Broken Hill City Council, clarifying evidence given by him and Mayor Tom Kennedy at the hearing on 6 March 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan:

- That the Committee accept and publish the letter of correction from Broken Hill City Council received 24 March 2025 with redactions of the statement "(Copies of email attached.)" on page 1, and footnote the published transcript to link to that letter of clarification at pages 51 and 53.
- That the Committee also accept and publish the attachment to the letter of correction and unredact the phrase 'Copies of email attached', if the secretariat can confirm consent from the Far West Regional Emergency Management Officer to the attachment's publication.

## **2.2 Updated publication orders for public hearing on 17 March 2025**

The Committee considered the attached email correspondence from the NSW Telco Authority requesting the redaction of the following statements on page 20 of the transcript of the evidence given by Mr Josh Weston, Manager of Operational Risk and Intelligence, Network Operations & Emergency Management, NSW Telco Authority:

- \*\*\*
- \*\*\*

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the above identified statements on page 20 be redacted in the corrected transcript of public evidence given 17 March 2025 which is published and uploaded on the Committee's webpage.

## **2.3 Report workshop**

The Committee discussed potential content of the report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace:

- That the Committee permit the audio and visual recording of today's report workshop.
- That only secretariat access the recording, and delete the recording after the report is tabled and published.

Discussion ensued.

## **3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 11.51am until Tuesday 20 May 2025 at 10.00am.

## **Minutes of meeting no. 27**

TIME & DATE: 10.03AM, 8 MAY 2025

LOCATION: ROOM 1254 AND VIA WEBEX

### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr (Chair), Mrs Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair), Mrs Judy Hannan and Mr James Wallace.

### **Officers present**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Alex Read, Lloyd Connolly and Janish Hettigama.

### **APOLOGIES**

Maryanne Stuart.

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That the minutes of the meeting of 31 March 2025 be confirmed.

2. \*\*\*

3. **Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

**3.1 Letter of clarification regarding the transcript of the public hearing on 6 March 2025**

The Committee considered the attached letter from Transgrid dated 28 March 2025 and received 31 March 2025, clarifying evidence given by Marie Jordan at the hearing on 6 March 2025 and providing supplementary information regarding Transgrid's Far West NSW Community Partnership Program.

Resolved, on the motion of: Mr Wallace: That the Committee accept and publish the letter from Transgrid dated 28 March 2025, and footnote the published transcript to link to this letter at pages 78 and 80.

**3.2 Materials following briefing with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Attachment D)**

The Committee noted the resolution of 17 March 2025: 'That the Committee notify the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water of its intention to publish the materials provided and to invite the Department to raise any objections regarding publication.'

The Committee considered the attached email from Mr Jamie Caldwell, Energy & Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator (EUSFAC), Energy & Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA), Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water received 21 March 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the Committee publish the following materials provided by Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water:

- Life Support Customers explainer note, and
- Spreadsheet detailing the outages for specific areas in the Far West NSW for the period from 17 October to 2 November 2025.

**3.3 Answers received to questions on notice, supplementary questions and questions in lieu of appearing at a public hearing**

The Committee considered answers to questions taken on notice at the public hearings held in March 2025, supplementary questions and questions to agencies in lieu of appearing at a public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace:

- That the Committee accept and publish the following answers received to questions taken on notice at the public hearings held in March 2025, supplementary questions and questions to government agencies in lieu of appearing at a public hearing:
  - Aboriginal Affairs NSW – 7 April 2025
  - Australian Energy Regulator – 15 April 2025

- AGL – 28 March 2025
- Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC – 4 April 2025
- Broken Hill City Council – 3 April 2025
- Business Far West NSW – 3 April 2025
- ClubsNSW – 28 March 2025
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water – 5 April 2025
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice – 1 April 2025
- Hydrostor – 28 March 2025
- Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) – 3 April 2025
- Legal Aid NSW – 27 March 2025
- Meals on Wheels Broken Hill – 3 April 2025
- Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW Rural Fire Service – 25 March 2025
- Mining and Energy Union – 3 April 2025
- Broken Hill Westhaven – 4 April 2025
- LiveBetter – 4 April 2025
- NSW Department of Education – 8 April 2025
- NSW Health – 3 April 2025
- NSW Police Force, Western Region Office – 1 April 2025
- NSW Reconstruction Authority – 9 April 2025
- NSW Rural Fire Service – 3 April 2025
- NSW State Emergency Service – 1 April 2025
- NSW Telco Authority – 3 April 2025
- Perilya – 25 March 2025
- Regional Development Australia Far West – 26 March 2025
- Mr Roy Butler MP, Member for Barwon – 7 April 2025
- Service NSW – 1 April 2025
- Telstra – 27 March 2025
- Tilt Renewables – 4 April 2025
- Transgrid – 31 March 2025
- Transport for NSW – 3 April 2025
- That the Committee accept and publish the following answers received to questions taken on notice at the public hearings held on 5 and 6 March 2025 and supplementary questions and keep confidential the attachments provided with those answers:
  - Central Darling Shire Council – 17 March 2025
  - Essential Energy – 28 March 2025

#### **4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 10.11am until 20 May 2025 at 10.00am.

#### **Unconfirmed minutes of meeting no. 28**

TIME & DATE: 2.09PM, 29 MAY 2025

LOCATION: MEETING ROOM 1136



## **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Clayton Barr (Chair), Sally Quinnell (Deputy Chair), Judy Hannan, Maryanne Stuart and James Wallace.

## **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Stephanie Mulvey, Anna Tran, Joan Douce, Alex Read, Lloyd Connolly and Janish Hettigama.

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **1. Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the minutes of the meeting of 8 May 2025 be confirmed.

### **2. \*\*\***

### **3. Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

#### **3.1 Answers to supplementary questions**

The Committee noted the resolution of 8 May 2025 that the Committee accept and publish the answers to supplementary questions received 3 April 2025 from Broken Hill City Council, and that the answers were not published because the attachments to those answers were not previously provided to the Committee.

The Committee considered the attachments to the answers to supplementary questions from Broken Hill City Council, separately circulated.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That the Committee accept the answers to supplementary questions received 3 April 2025 from Broken Hill City Council, and keep confidential the attachments provided with those answers.

#### **3.2 Consideration of Chair's draft report**

The Committee considered the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee consider the report chapter by chapter.

The Committee considered Chapter One of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That paragraph 1.19 be amended by:

- Insert the word 'currently' before the words 'the only source'.
- Replace the words 'supply to' with the words 'supply sold to consumers, including households and businesses, in'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That Chapter One, as amended, stand part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Two of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That, after paragraph 2.36, a table be inserted with the following words:

Case study 4: How the outages impacted Rebecca Young's small business[Footnote: Rebecca Young, [Evidence](#), 4 March 2025, p 13.]

Milparinka Hotel is located 40 km south of Tibooburra. Rebecca Young, the hotel operator, advised that they were without power for three days, causing significant business interruption to an event that was being held at the venue.

She told us that, at the time of the outage emergency, 'I had a rally of 500 people... The rally organisers were starting to get a bit shirty at me because we were struggling to keep up' and that:

I have no generators, so I've lost food and loss of business, and it was just a nightmare. Without power we can't even flush a toilet, so we've got three days where we can't even flush a toilet. I felt three days like I may as well have gone camping in the bush with nothing. I just feel very left out of the loop as my business and a small town—I've no idea what's going on.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That Chapter Two, as amended, stand part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Three of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That, after paragraph 3.14, insert a new paragraph with the words:

As noted earlier, Transgrid purchased the generators in 2022 from Essential Energy, who owned, operated and maintained them until the sale. This purchase followed the decision to decommission the generators, which was advised to Transgrid, and was to meet the resilience obligations under their transmission licence, in accordance with the RIT-T process.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That, after paragraph 3.37, insert a table with the following words:

What is a major incident under IPART's Incident Reporting Manual? [Footnote: IPART, [Electricity networks reporting manual – Incident reporting](#), October 2024, pp 16-17.]

Under IPART's Incident Reporting Manual, a major incident impacting reliability and power quality is one which causes a widespread energy supply interruption. Specifically, it covers an interruption:

- where a state of emergency has been declared under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* due to the impact of an outage,
- the cause of a declared state of emergency places the network at risk of loss of supply/failure,
- the network operator (i.e. the distribution or transmission network service provider) has classified it as a significant outage due to the adverse impact or disruption to the community,
- where a reliability or power quality issue resulted in a disruption, for greater than 2 hours, to the normal functioning of significant community infrastructure e.g. hospitals, road tunnels, travel on rail and airport transport systems,

- a distribution interruption impacting over 5,000 customers for more than four hours, or
- a transmission interruption amounting to over 0.25 System Minutes for the transmission network service provider.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That, in paragraph 3.51 after the words 'was restored on 31 October.', insert the following words:

AGL indicated in its submission that on 19 October it had completed its due diligence and was in a position to safely allow the BESS to operate in islanded mode during the outage. Transgrid continued to work with AGL to conduct its own due diligence to ensure that the BESS was able to operate safely. The BESS was not brought online until Transgrid completed this diligence on 26 October.[Footnote: [Submission 29](#), AGL, pp 3-5.]

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That Chapter Three, as amended, stand part of the report.

The meeting adjourned at 2.50pm and resumed at 4.20pm.

The Committee considered Chapter Four of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That:

- After recommendation 13, insert a new recommendation that reads:

That, in addition to recommendation 13, the NSW Privacy Commissioner publish guidance as a matter of urgency clarifying when, under existing NSW laws, healthcare and service providers can share with energy providers the health information of patients dependent on life support machines and other medical electrical devices during a significant electricity outage.
- After paragraph 4.74, insert a new paragraph with the words:

While the NSW Government considers possible legislative amendments to clarify this issue, the Committee notes that more guidance is needed in the interim to address this issue. One of the functions of the NSW Information and Privacy Commission is to oversee the HRIP Act, and the NSW Privacy Commissioner has statutory powers to enforce the Act's privacy protections.[Footnote: Information and Privacy Commission NSW (IPC), [NSW Privacy Laws](#), viewed 28 May 2025; IPC, [HRIP Act](#), viewed 28 May 2025.] Therefore, we have also recommended that the NSW Privacy Commissioner publish guidance clarifying when healthcare and service providers can share with energy providers the health information of patients dependent on machines for medical needs during a significant electricity outage.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That, after paragraph 4.68, insert a new paragraph with the words:

Essential Energy acknowledged that they do not have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or other service targets relating to the restoration of power to Life Support equipment during an unplanned outage.[Footnote: [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Essential Energy, 28 March 2025, p 21.] This would appear to be a key gap in the existing Life Support Customer framework.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell: That:

- In recommendation 15, replace the words 'establishing registers identifying vulnerable local residents for remote, rural and regional communities' with the words 'supporting the Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee to establish a register identifying vulnerable local residents in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area'.
- In paragraph 4.82 after the words 'emergency management and response.', insert the words:

Having this information centrally available to the Far West REMC could significantly expedite the process of identifying who needs what assistance in any future emergency response.

However, as outlined above, the Far West region is uniquely vulnerable given its dependence on a single line connection to the NEM. Additionally, the region is challenged by low socioeconomic status and the significant geographical isolation and distances between towns outside Broken Hill. As Greg Hill, General Manager of the Central Darling Shire Council, remarked:

I don't have a lot of staff, so when things happen like this—now I've been in Central Darling for seven years. During that seven years, I've faced seven situations like this—not just power outages, but also two floods, COVID and two fish kills. I have very limited resources. I have to rely on government agencies to back us up. ... A lot of the government agencies don't have an understanding of our communities. They expect we'll react, that we've got resources, we can take minutes and we can keep registers. [Footnote: Greg Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 5 March 2025 (Wilcannia), p 13.]

- In paragraph 4.82, replace the words 'establishing a register identifying and setting out their contact details for such vulnerable residents in remote, rural and regional communities' with the words 'supporting the Far West REMC to establish a register identifying vulnerable local residents in the Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That Chapter Four, as amended, stand part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Five of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That Chapter Five stand as part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Six of the Chair's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That in:

- Recommendation 19:
  - Replace the words 'vulnerable residents' with the words 'vulnerable communities', and
  - After the words 'aid their recovery', insert the words 'and improve resilience', and
- Paragraph 6.52:
  - Replace the word 'residents' with 'communities', and

- After the words 'aid their recovery', insert the words 'and improve resilience'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Wallace: That Chapter Six, as amended, stand part of the report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Quinnell:

- That the draft report as amended be the report of the Committee and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.
- That the Chair and committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors.
- That, once tabled, the report be posted on the Committee's webpage.

The Committee considered the timeframe for tabling the report.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart: That the Committee write to the Minister for Energy about the further revised inquiry timeline to table the report by early June 2025.

### **3.3 Report cover**

The Committee considered the attached report cover options.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Hannan: That the attached report cover option 1 be the cover of the report.

### **4. \*\*\***

### **5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 4.55pm until a date and time to be determined.

## Appendix Seven – Glossary

A-CAES	Advanced Compressed Air Energy Storage
ACCO	Aboriginal community-controlled organisation
ACLO	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
AEMC	Australian Energy Market Commission
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
AER	Australian Energy Regulator
ARENA	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
BESS	AGL's Battery Energy Storage System
Combat agency	An agency responsible for leading the response to a specified hazard emergency
COW	Cell on Wheels
CPAP	Continuous positive airway pressure
DCCEEW	NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
DER	Distributed energy resource
DNSP	Distribution network service provider
EMPLAN	State Emergency Management Plan
EUSFAC	Energy and Utility Services Functional Area Coordinator
GPS	Generator Performance Standard
GT	Gas turbine
IPART	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committees
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committee
LEOC	Local Emergency Operations Centre
LEOCON	Local Emergency Operations Controller
LGA	Local Government Area
LHD	Local Health District
NEL	National Electricity Law (Cth)
NEM	National Electricity Market
NER	National Electricity Rules (Cth)
NSP	Network service provider
OCSE	Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer

REMC	Regional Emergency Management Committee
REMO	Regional Emergency Management Officer
REOC	Regional Emergency Operations Centre
REOCON	Regional Emergency Operations Controller
RIT-T	Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission
SAPS	Standalone power systems
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
SERM Act	<i>State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989</i>
Sub Plan	NSW Electricity Supply Emergency Sub Plan
TNSP	Transmission network service provider