

Minutes

Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone™ project

Community Advisory Group (GCAG)

Meeting #5

Date: Thursday 10 August 2023

Time: 4:30pm – 6:30pm

Location: Nakunbalook Environmental and Cultural Education Centre, Nakunbalook Place, Sale, VIC

Attendees:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wendy Bezzina (Chairperson) (WB) • Ian Bye (IB) • Nick Dudley (ND) • Graeme Stuckey (GS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirra Bott (KB) • Tony Cantwell (TC) • Hamilton Gerrand (HG) • Mathias Wood (MW) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lorraine Bull (LB) • Ian Crooke (IC) • Ian Hill (IH) • Colin Young (CY)
GREZ project team/AusNet attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lily Habib (LH) • Kellie Nichols (KN) • Bridget Cairns (BC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renee Kurowski (RK) • Brett Millsom (BM) • Brett Nelson (BN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marisa Feher (MF) • Gary Stevens (secretariat)
Apologies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tess Ingram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Petrakos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Mooney

Item	Discussion
1	<p>Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country, Housekeeping/Administration</p> <p>WB welcomed attendees to the meeting and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was taking place, the Gunaikurnai people.</p>
2	<p>Project update</p> <p>LH gave an update on the G-REZ project.</p> <p>Winter ecological surveys and cultural heritage walkover surveys were undertaken in July on some properties AusNet has access to. The cultural heritage surveys were completed alongside archaeologists and representatives from GLaWAC, and several artefacts were found with the results helping to inform the project's Environment Effects Statement (EES). The ecological surveys involved bird calls, targeted flora surveys and vegetation quality assessments. Members were invited to discuss the findings in more detail with Marisa after the meeting. The team also received images from the autumn surveys which will be included in the next Project Update. Preparations are underway for upcoming cultural heritage walkovers and spring ecological surveys in September. AusNet wants to continue these seasonal surveys despite pulling back on some activities, as there would be a one-year delay to the following season if the surveys were to be deferred.</p> <p>Earlier this year AusNet had reduced some of its broader community engagement around the G-REZ project to avoid confusion and overlapping with VicGrid's transmission planning. Following recent discussions with VicGrid, AusNet will now further reduce community engagement. The next quarterly Project Update will be issued in the next couple of weeks but the next one will be deferred until January</p>

2024. The project will continue with environmental studies and will continue to have discussions with landowners proposed to host infrastructure. This will help keep the dialogue with landowners to maintain the momentum with them. AusNet will also participate in events such as the Gippsland New Energy Conference and Gippy Youth New Energy Jobs Summit. AusNet is also engaging an independent consultant to review HVDC undergrounding; this work may not be completed by October but we hope to be able to share this at the December meeting.

In order to ensure there is no overlap with VicGrid's activities, AusNet suggests pausing the October GCAG meeting but would like the group to assist in making a decision on it. WB called for members' perspectives on whether or not to defer the October meeting to a later date. IB supported deferring the group's next meeting until VicGrid has made an announcement on its preferred transmission options. TC suggested that by retaining the October meeting, the CAG would maintain its momentum in the case any government decisions are delayed. WB suggested an option could be to defer October's meeting and bring forward December's meeting to November. LB supported this but wants to ensure there is still a flow of information to the community as there remains a gap in knowledge around transmission developments among the general public. Following general support among the group, it was decided the next meeting will be held in November, with none in October or December.

3 Transmission Vegetation Management

Following interest from members at the last meeting, Bridget Cairns, General Manager Asset Operations and Services, and Brett Nelson, Vegetation Contract Operations Manager, made a presentation to the group about the management and maintenance of AusNet's transmission corridor easements.

The presentation covered the following areas:

- **Managing vegetation in an AusNet context**

Vegetation management on easements is a top strategic priority for AusNet and is heavily regulated. Vegetation management is required in order to mitigate the risk of causing a catastrophic bushfire. AusNet also needs to ensure the cost to customers is managed and that the supply of electricity remains reliable.

- **Overview of transmission compliance**

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) oversees energy safety in Victoria, administering Electricity Safety Regulations which AusNet must comply with, as well as an enforcement regime that monitors compliance. The minimum clearance space is 10 metres from a tower and 6.4 metres from a cable plus cable movement (sag and sway) – 15-19 metres total for 500kV. AusNet's 8500 transmission segments are inspected annually with around 10% cut, plus 10-20% of the fuel load managed. Lidar scans (a fixed wing aircraft which produces an image of the network) are undertaken annually. AusNet undertakes an internal quality audit program and is also subject to an annual audit from ESV. There has been zero major Non-Conformances with ESV and zero fire starts during decades from our transmission infrastructure.

- **The responsibilities of ESV, AusNet and landowners**

ESV sets easement regulations including minimum clearance space and fuel load requirements, as well as mitigating the risk of trees falling into the clearance space.

AusNet submits an Electric Line Clearance Management Plan (<https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/safety/vegetation-and-powerline-clearance>) to ESV for approval. It then implements this plan which includes annual Lidar scans and negotiations between field arborists and landowners to clear vegetation to specifications. The vegetation is then cut by delivery partners based on the Lidar inspection. AusNet consults with landowners and abides by agreed reasonable access protocols, as well as abiding by the Biosecurity Management Policy. AusNet maintains access tracks (to towers) to a 4WD standard. AusNet also ensures its delivery partners comply to applicable standards and responsibilities as a minimum.

Landowners are requested to provide safe and unhindered access. Landowners are also asked not to stockpile flammable material, no to plant tall growing vegetation on the easement and to provide AusNet with any biosecurity requirements.

- **Transmission easement management workflow**

Easements are inspected annually. AusNet notifies and consults with the landowner over any action that needs to be taken. The delivery partner gets in touch with the landowner and complies with biosecurity requirements and performs the maintenance. It is audited by field arborists and then annually by ESV through a field-based compliance audit with AusNet required to rectify any issues. Contact details for landowners will be the Field Officer or in an emergency 131 799, or by email at vegetation@ausnetservices.com.au

- **Easement management of underground cables**

Using the Victorian Desal transmission as an example, in the case of underground cables, AusNet uses a combination of aerial (10 per year) and ground patrol (1 per year) to monitor vegetation. Aerial patrol image captures are analysed to identify issues that may interfere with the operation of the underground cables. AusNet then liaises with responsible parties or landowners prior to ground patrol. AusNet maintains access tracks to a 4WD standard and manages easement warning markers. Landowners must provide safe and unhindered access for patrols, ensure thermal protection barriers are not changed or damaged, must not stockpile flammable material or locate sheds, or plant tall growing vegetation or excavate/plough on the easement.

- **Minimum clearance space for conductors**

- For 500kV the minimum clearance space for conductors (inclusive of the applicable distance plus swag and sway) is 11m vertical and 15-19m horizontal depending on the length of the transmission segment.

Members asked the following questions:

What happens with vegetation that is cut, is it taken offsite or left? BN responded that some asked for it to be left (mulched onsite and left) while some wanted it removed.

How are potential outbreaks of myrtle rust dealt with? BN responded that AusNet would abide by any declarations made by authorities.

Do the regulations apply to both transmission and distribution lines? BC responded that the regulations differed for transmission and distribution but they are statewide.

Would be an agreement in place for compensation to access landowners' properties? BC responded that there is no compensation for access, this is paid upfront when the easement is established. The regulations provide that AusNet would need access to undertake maintenance of the lines.

What are the standards for warning markers for underground components? Using the Vic Desal line as an example, BC responded that warning markers are there to indicate where joints are located.

Several members asked questions around cropping on an underground easement. BC reiterated that her team is responsible for vegetation management on the easements, rather than the engineering and construction of underground cables which would determine depths and permissible activities.

Can AusNet recirculate the transmission presentation which was shown at a previous meeting, which shows the estimated depths for undergrounding a 500kV AC line such as G-REZ? This will be recirculated with the minutes.

Can land used for access tracks to build towers be rehabilitated after construction? BN responded that the construction of access tracks varies, with some access tracks built to towers and some built between towers within the easement. If the construction crew needs it, the track would be maintained. If vegetation crews need to access properties for cutting, this would be done through negotiation with landowners where access would be discussed.

Question on notice: Members further discussed the permissible activities on a 500 kV AC underground transmission easement. AusNet committed to asking its independent consultant exploring HVDC underground transmission infrastructure for its advice on this matter, and for this to be shared as part of the upcoming presentation with the group.

4 Industry Capability Network (ICN) Gateway

Colin Young gave a presentation on the ICN Gateway and Gippsland project opportunities.

ICN is a not-for-profit network ensuring small and medium sized enterprises are given full and fair opportunity to work on major procurements and projects by identifying opportunities for local

participation, innovation, and growth. It does this by implementing procurement policies, connecting suppliers with project opportunities (via a national database), providing data and insights into industry growth, and assisting suppliers to deliver local sustainable outcomes.

ICN is based Australia-wide and operates across a range of industries including infrastructure and renewables. It organises industry briefing sessions to provide a connection between project developers and local suppliers, manufacturers and subcontractors.

During the 2022 financial year ICN Victoria had about \$233b in government procurements registered, with more than 5300 EOIs from local manufacturers to supply into Australia and New Zealand work packages, with about 25,000 ICN Gateway subscribers. CY detailed the Victorian Local Jobs First Policy which compels government agencies to localise supply for their projects through the setting of targets.

CY recommended businesses register on the ICN Gateway and for members to visit the Gippsland Project Opportunities page at (<https://gateway.icn.org.au/project/4059/gippsland-project-opportunities>).

The following questions were asked after Colin's presentation:

How are the local jobs targets set for each project? CY responded that the targets are embedded in the Local Jobs First Policy.

How is 'local' defined? CY responded that 'local' in this context means Australia-wide rather than specifically Gippsland.

Does ICN assess and filter EOIs before passing them on to companies? CY responded that this was possible if the company asks for it, however was not the normal practice.

Do suppliers remain on the ICN database and do they have to register for each EOI? CY confirmed that suppliers remain registered on the database so it was important to keep their profile details updated to look attractive to developers, but they have to apply for each EOI.

Do companies need to include details such as safety policy, insurance, etc. when setting up their profiles? CY responded that while it is not required, it is recommended since many projects had such prerequisites for tenders.

5 Member feedback – 'What we are hearing'

Ian Hill and Hamilton Gerrand provided feedback to the GCAG regarding what they were hearing about G-REZ and transmission infrastructure within the local community and other networks.

Ian Hill

IH reported that he made a submission to the Essential Services Commission's (ESC) Draft Land Access Code of Practice, in order to generate discussion on the reimbursement of costs and revenue sharing as compensation to landowners. He also attended an online forum that the ESC ran to get feedback, however the ESC noted the Code of Practice will not cover compensation. IH said the ESC had forwarded his submission to DEECA however he has yet to receive a response. He informed members that the ESC's acting CEO Sarah Sheppard said she was happy to attend a GCAG meeting to discuss the Code of Practice with members. IH attended the VicGrid webinar on 7 August and noted that developers involved in transmission would be asked to contribute to a community benefit fund. He also undertook some research and found the wind turbine industry was providing good compensation to landowners.

IH provided members with a copy of his submission as well as background notes which detailed his submission and the arguments for revenue sharing as compensation.

Hamilton Gerrand

HG reported that communities affected by G-REZ are pushing to have lines put underground, and people living in the Giffard and Stradbroke areas are very concerned about living next door to substations, with concerns around noise levels, radiation levels, disruption to wildlife behaviours, pollutants entering waterways and why the sites can't be put in plantation land rather than near houses. Some companies have put scoping works on hold until VicGrid announces a transmission route. Some developers are keeping in touch with landholders and/or progressing landowner engagement, but

Hamilton advised that landowners he has spoken with around Giffard/Stradbroke will only support an underground solution.

VicGrid's roundtable sessions at Giffard West Hall on Wednesday 8 August were well attended with five tables set up in the following categories: technical options, community benefits and compensation, bushfire risks, offshore wind projects and draft options assessment methods. The sessions were well received with technical options suggesting that underground HVAC could run for 30km before having to surface and HVDC 500kV lines requiring large footprints for transition stations at either end but could run underground for the full length of the project. Overhead transmission was also discussed as well as a combination of overhead and underground. VicGrid is hoping to have its defined corridors released to the public by Quarter 4 of this year or Quarter 1 of next year.

6 Jobs, skills and supply chain

BM gave a presentation on some of the work the G-REZ team has been doing around securing a skilled workforce and components to deliver the G-REZ transmission project. The presentation focused on maximising local employment opportunities across the project's lifecycle, training and skills required to deliver the project, as well as which components and materials are necessary and can be sourced locally.

- **Jobs and skilled labour challenges:** BM highlighted some of the challenges around labour and skills which came out of a 2021 report from Infrastructure Australia's Market Capacity Program. Challenges include shortages both in larger occupational groups and more specialised jobs, forecast volatility in labour demand, and barriers to skill development. However, there are also opportunities for the better coordination of training, skills and workforce development. Current projections for labour demand in the energy sector could significantly underestimate growth, while it also found that state REZ programs could result in higher demand for materials.
- **Local job opportunities:** AusNet has looked at local job opportunities and has established a register of Gippsland businesses that might be able to provide services, as well as begun discussions with ICN to utilise its networks.
- **Local job challenges:** A number of services and roles are not able to be sourced within Gippsland. This is due to factors such as the skills not being present locally, global competition for skilled labour in renewable projects, competition from other non-energy major projects, and existing service providers not having the ability to support the development and construction of a 500kV line.
- **Key skills required:** Certificate II in Transmission Line Construction (to work in transmission line construction/assembly), Certificate III in Electricity Supply Industry (Transmission Overhead) (to work as a high voltage overhead transmission line worker including installation of towers, poles and conductors), and increasing demand for tertiary qualified engineers.
- **Key skills challenges:** Transmission roles involve specialised skills with long lead-times, and there are very few training providers in Australia which can deliver the required training courses. Since it's been decades since new major transmission infrastructure was built, many of those skilled workers are nearing retirement and there are limited trainers available and qualified to deliver course material and/or train the future workforce.
- **Key activities in skills/training:** AusNet is working to see how it can support Federation University's Bachelor of Engineering (Renewable Energy) course commencing next year, as well as with TAFE providers and RTOs to understand how it can support the delivery of Certificate III in Electricity Supply Industry (Transmission Overhead). AusNet is also working with TAFE Gippsland to establish a local roundtable to understand the skills gaps and opportunities.
- **Supply chain challenges:** Inflation and rising costs on materials are putting pressure on projects, and lengthy timeframes for testing and accreditation of materials.
- **Local supply chain opportunities:** AusNet has looked at which components could be sourced locally and has noted that even smaller components of a much larger project can be a significant opportunity.

BM also highlighted the work being done by the G-REZ team with students through the Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network. This program provides an opportunity for local students to work with industry mentors on real-world challenges. One of the students the G-REZ team is working with at

Marist Sion College has designed the official logo that will be used for the Gippy Youth New Energy Jobs Summit as part of the Gippsland New Energy Conference in late August.

Members raised the possibility of sending local workers overseas to access on the job learning in countries where this was possible.

Actions

Action	Assigned to	Due date
AusNet to set the date for the November meeting and inform members.	G-REZ staff	17 August 2023
Members further discussed the permissible activities on a 500 kV AC underground transmission easement. AusNet committed to asking its independent consultant exploring HVDC underground transmission infrastructure for its advice on this matter, and for this to be shared as part of the upcoming presentation with the group.	G-REZ staff	November meeting