EnergyCo

Meeting Minutes

New England Renewable Energy Zone Regional Steering Committee (SteerCo)

Meeting Minutes

Date: 17 September 2026 – 9.00am to 11.40pm

Location: Tamworth

Co-Chairs: Toni Averay (TA), GM, Uralla Shire Council;

Doug Parris (DP), Executive Project Director, New England REZ, EnergyCo

Attended

Councils

Paul Bennett (PB) – Tamworth Regional Council

Alex Manners (AM)– Armidale Regional Council

Brett McInnes (BM) – Inverell Shire Council

Councillor Marc Sutherland (MS) – Tamworth Regional Council (Item 2 only)

Stephen Parry (SPa) – Walcha Council

Sharon Pope (SP) – Muswellbrook Shire Council

Greg McDonald (GM) – Upper Hunter Shire Council (online)

Mat Pringle (MP) – Upper Hunter Shire Council (online)

State Agencies

Leanne Sharpe (LS) – TAFE NSW

Kate Ware (KW) – Department of Education

Simon Mould (SM) – Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

Leah Cooke (LC) – Transport for NSW (TfNSW) (online – Item 10 only)

Blake Hornsby (BH)– TfNSW (online – Item 10 only)

Alison Treloar (AT) – Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)

Dane O'Connor (DOC) – DPIRD

Malcolm St Hill (MSH)– NSW Premier's Department

Miaye Mon (MM) – NSW Premier's Department

Alex Lawrie (AL) – TfNSW (online – Item 10 only)

EnergyCo

Georgina Franklin (GF)

Barry McGrattan (BMc)

Michael Gibson (MG)

Panduka Manamperi (PM) – EnergyCo (online - Item 10 only)

Michael Burden (MB)

Andrew Kouros (AK)

Teresa Coletta (TC)

Justin Roach (JR) (online – Item 6 only)

Wayne Hillier (WH) (online – Item 10 only)

Apologies

Matt Francisco (MF)– Tenterfield Shire Council

Bernard Smith (BS)– Glen Innes Severn Council

James Roncon (JR)– Armidale Regional Council

Shaelee Richards (SR)– Muswellbrook Shire Council

Heather Wilson (HW)– NSW Environment Protection Authority

Agenda item discussion and actions

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
1	Welcome and introduction	EnergyCo	• DP welcomed the SteerCo participants (**Committee**) to Tamworth and opened the meeting.
2	Acknowledgement of Country	Cr Marc Sutherland	• Councillor Marc Sutherland provided the Acknowledgement of Country and left prior to agenda item 3.
3	Co-Chair address	Co-Chair	• TA delivered the Co-Chair address and reflected on: o Uralla as the centre of REZ project activity, and the need to get positive outcomes for regional communities. o the significance of the participant engaging in the SteerCo and forming good working relationships to maximise the opportunities as a result of the REZ, while also focussing on minimising the impacts. o recognising the good relationships built with EnergyCo while also acknowledging there's a lot of work still to do in the delivery of the project with the support of councils.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed

4	Working Group #1 update	DCCEEW	• SM outlined the scope and objectives of the *Water Policy Working Group*, the issues, opportunities and next steps. This included policy specific issues rather than infrastructure solutions.
			• The Committee noted progress of the Working Group #1 and the workshop conclusions that no major policy constraints have been identified at this stage.
			• Key issues considered included: consistency in planning requirements, access to recycled-water guidance, the status of the Chaffey pipeline, and more certainty around future REZ water demand.
			• It was noted that communities required clearer messaging and reassurance on how water will be managed for project purposes, in terms of licensed water use in the *Water Management Act 2000 (NSW)* and councils' management of town water supplies. Councils acknowledged they could support this through public-facing position statements.
			• DCCEEW advised that the NSW Government's existing water-sharing framework already establishes that the first priority is the environment, followed by basic landholder rights and then licensed extraction. Between categories of licences, local water utility access licences have the highest priority. This hierarchy should be clearly communicated to communities for awareness.
			• The Committee agreed Working Group #1 had fulfilled its purpose and could be closed, with the following actions to continue separately:
			  ○ EnergyCo and DCCEEW Water to:
			  ▪ discuss the potential benefits and costs of developing a SEPP with Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI)
			  ▪ refine water demand estimates and share these with councils.
			  ▪ consider the Chaffey pipeline and other identified initiatives through the feasibility assessment process. Note, this is the pathway for new infrastructure initiatives to be considered and further scoped, and the Armidale to Uralla proposal was discussed in this context.
			  ○ Councils and DCCEEW Water to continue engagement on recycled-water opportunities and guidance.
			• Action: Working Group #1 to brief Working Group #2 on its findings and the proposed council position statements.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
5	Working Group #2 update	EnergyCo	• AK outlined the scope, objectives, progress and next steps of the *Communication of Generator Data Working Group*. • The Committee noted that inconsistent, outdated or unavailable generator information affects council strategic planning and local business preparedness but acknowledged the differing levels of detailed information available from generator proponents primarily relates to their stage of project development. • The Working Group #2 is exploring potential minimum information requirements and standardised datasets at different stages of project development to support council planning and decision-making. • Further work will capture council and DPIRD experiences on generator data availability and use, seek generator feedback and identify practical improvements. • It was noted that councils should communicate to generators what limitations exist for access to specific resources in their LGAs, e.g., councils may need to include limits during drought or other supply constraints. This will help manage competing demand and generator expectations. • The Working Group #2 will continue its investigations and report findings and potential improvements to the SteerCo.
6	Feedback on Working Group establishment	EnergyCo	• Feedback on the SteerCo working groups was positive, with general consensus that they are improving collaboration and overall focus on priority outcomes and activities.
7	New England feasibility study update	EnergyCo	• JR outlined EnergyCo's proposed key activities, deliverables, engagement and program for the strategic options and feasibility assessment covering water, waste and worker accommodation infrastructure. • The work underway will build upon the opportunities register initiatives already provided by councils, establish a validated baseline, assess and prioritise infrastructure options, and undertake economic, delivery and feasibility analysis. • The next round of local and state government engagement is planned to commence in October 2026 to test priorities and options of shortlisted opportunities; with further development and refinement of options throughout the course of 2026.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
8	Workforce Accommodation & Housing Strategy	EnergyCo	• The Committee received an update on the EnergyCo strategy, which is intended to establish a coordinated regional view of workforce accommodation demand and identify temporary accommodation and permanent legacy housing opportunities. • Engagement with generators, councils and housing/delivery agencies is underway. • Potential temporary worker accommodation and legacy sites have been identified through council discussions, with further assessment and engagement to continue. • The strategy is targeted for completion in late 2026. • The Committee noted that housing strategy is a localised issue, with Muswellbrook and Tamworth councils already undertaking studies of their own. Joint market engagement was considered a potential positive approach to further explore. • The Committee endorsed the creation of a Regional Housing Strategy Working group to include participants from Uralla, Armidale and EnergyCo.

9	DCCEEW Water Overview	DCCEEW	• DCCEEW Water outlined work it is undertaking across the NE REZ in collaboration with EnergyCo to:
			  ○ understand council infrastructure capacity
			  ○ update water demand estimates
			  ○ identify potential enabling initiatives
			  ○ investigate groundwater recharge potential for selected water sources.
			• Water demand and capacity information will be finalised to inform the broader feasibility assessments.

Item	Description	Lead	Points discussed
10	Road categorisation and REZ Development	TfNSW	• TfNSW outlined the NSW road categorisation framework and implications of increased REZ-related heavy vehicle movements. • Road classification is based on a road's enduring role in the broader network, not temporary construction demand and that alternatives to road re-classification are also considered as options (e.g., alternate routes, temporary interventions, etc.) • The Committee noted that road re-categorisation is only one potential mechanism and may not address the broader funding, maintenance and asset-management impacts associated with REZ development (which includes OSOM movements). • TfNSW is undertaking baseline investigations into primary and secondary REZ corridors and their existing asset condition. • A unit-rate cost model is also being developed to quantify additional pavement deterioration and maintenance costs associated with REZ heavy-vehicle movements. The intention is to use a consistent state-wide approach for calculating road maintenance and deterioration costs. • EnergyCo advised it was the intention to incorporate the unit-rate cost model into the relevant third party agreements with councils to ensure councils, as road authorities, were cost compensated for increased road maintenance. The Committee acknowledged this was a sensible and balanced approach, subject to a review of the detail once the model is available from TfNSW.
11	Any other business	EnergyCo	• Next meeting is to be held on 4 February 2027 in Uralla. • Participants supported councils inviting their REZ Coordinator to future meetings (as applicable to agenda, and limited to 1 person only) • Representatives from DPIRD and TAFE NSW offered to present agency updates at next meeting
12	Wrap up and close	Co-Chair	• TA thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting.

Actions

Ref	Action	Responsible	Due	Status
RSC-01-001	EnergyCo will assist with the initial creation of the two proposed Project Groups and seek nominations for the appropriate leads and participants.	EnergyCo	3/7/26	Closed

Ref	Action	Responsible	Due	Status
RSC-01-002	Terms of Reference to be updated to replace references of Project Groups to Working Groups and re-distributed.	EnergyCo	3/7/26	Closed
RSC-01-003	SteerCo participants to provide suggested agenda items for the next meeting to the Secretariat no later than 31 July 2026.	All	31/7/26	Closed
RSC-02-004	Working Group #1 to brief Working Group #2 on its findings and the proposed council position statements.	DCCEEW	1/10/2026	Open